



# Truth on the Tragedy of France

By

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Translated by N. Scarlyn Wilson

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A ma Femme,  
Rita Bois,  
Sans qui  
Je n'aurais pas eu  
Le courage  
D'entreprendre  
Et de mener à bien  
Cette œuvre ;

A ma Patrie  
La France,  
Qui ne peut pas  
Mourir ;

Au Peuple britannique  
Dont je partage,  
Dans l'exil,  
Les amertumes,  
Le courage,  
L'espoir  
et  
La volonté  
De vaincre ;

Je dédic  
Ce livre.

To my Wife,  
Rita Bois,  
Without whom  
I should not have had  
The courage  
To undertake  
And carry through  
This work ;

To my Country  
France,  
Which cannot  
Die ;

To the British People  
With whom I share,  
In exile,  
The bitterness,  
The courage,  
The hope  
and  
The will  
To conquer ;

I dedicate  
This book.





“ IN PRESENTING THESE SINCERE AND BURN-  
ING PAGES TO THE BRITISH PEOPLE I SAY  
TO THEM: ‘ THEY ARE YOURS ! DO NOT  
REFUSE THEM, EVEN IF MY TESTIMONY AND  
MY JUDGMENTS OF THIS OR THAT MAN,  
AND ON THIS OR THAT POINT CAUSE YOU  
DISILLUSIONMENT OR SURPRISE. THEY  
COME FROM A MAN WHO WILL NEVER IN  
HIS LOVE BE ABLE TO SEPARATE YOUR  
NATION AND HIS OWN.’ ”



# Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE - - - - -	15
I. "HOW AND WHY?" - - - - -	23
Significant Dates—A Chain of Causes and a Conjunction of Treacheries.	
II. HITLER HERALDS THE WAR. HIS PACT WITH MOSCOW - - - - -	28
If the Russo-German Pact had not been signed—How I learned at Burgos of the Signing of the Pact—A saying of M. Jeanneney.	
III. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR - - - - -	35
Mr. Chamberlain's stinging retort to Herr von Ribbentrop—Franco-British Conference in Paris—A Memorable Document—An Accusation.	
IV. SIGNOR MUSSOLINI'S TRAP - - - - -	43
Mussolini's proposal to hold a Conference was a trap prepared in agreement with Hitler—The proof of this is discussed by reference to a German White Book—A Statement by Mr. Chamberlain—Hitler was intent on War.	
V. THE TWO GEORGES BONNETS - - - - -	55
How much is M. Georges Bonnet's accusation worth?—It is in disagreement with his Yellow Book—Blanc Bonnet and Bonnet Blanc are two—Chautemps and Bonnet at a Lunch—Bonnet and Herr von Ribbentrop exchange denials—M. Jules Lukasiewicz's opinion of M. Bonnet—M. Bonnet's illusions about Germany—Bonnet the "Bear."	
VI. EDOUARD DALADIER AND THE DECLARATION OF WAR - - - - -	68
At the French Chamber of Deputies on September 2nd, 1939—Divisions in the Parties—The Political Difficulties of M. Daladier—Lack of Men—Decadence of the Political Régime—The Turmoil of 1936—The Character and Popularity of M. Daladier.	
VII. M. DALADIER AT GRIPS WITH PARTY PASSIONS	78
M. Daladier seeks to form a Great War Ministry and to change the Minister for Foreign Affairs—A Memory of a Chautemps Cabinet—Barrage against M. Léon Blum—M. Herriot offered the post of Foreign Secretary—Long-standing rivalry between Herriot and Daladier—M. Herriot wants to be covered by Marshal Pétain—The Marshal's veto against Herriot.	

VIII. THE CONDITION OF THE FRENCH NAVY, ARMY  
AND AIR FORCE IN 1939 - - - 87

The French Navy has never been better—Admiral Darlan—Inferiority of the French Air Force—M. Guy la Chambre—Secret Session of February, 1939—Attack and Defence—The Maginot Line—General Gamelin—General de Gaulle, a voice crying in the Wilderness—The War of Waiting—The Opinions of General Debeney, General Huntziger and General Buhner—Unheeded insistence of Mr. Hore Belisha—The "war of rot."

IX. HITLER'S PLAN OF ATTACK ON THE SOUL OF  
FRANCE - - - - - 102

The Soviets take their share of the booty in Poland—The errors of Franco-British Policy—March 7th, 1936—Hitler tries to dissociate France from England.

X. THE FIFTH COLUMN AT WORK - - - 109

Marshal Goering makes advances to France—First allusion to the need for a Declaration specifying that France and England cannot negotiate a separate Peace—Communiqué of the First Supreme War Council—Fifth Column Anti-British Propaganda—The Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate and Chamber as centres of intrigue—M. Pierre Laval gets ready—M. Henry Bérenger—M. Mistler—M. P. E. Flandin—M. Bergery—M. Pétri—M. Malvy—M. Montigny—Anatole de Monzie—Peace Offensive of the Reich and the U.S.S.R.—A saying of M. de Brinon—Camille Chautemps—Mr. Chamberlain's and M. Daladier's replies to Hitler—The Ministry of Information—M. Frossard's Candidature—In the Press—A Plot against M. Daladier—Mutual antipathy of M. Daladier and M. Reynaud—Conversations with M. Paul Reynaud.

XI. M. PIERRE LAVAL MAKES READY TO RETURN 136

Herr von Ribbentrop declares his love for France—A conversation with M. Pierre Laval—He gambles on Marshal Pétain—"A Statue on a Pedestal"—M. Laval's career—Saved by Briand—Caillaux and Clemenceau—His Foreign Policy.

XII. AN UNHEALTHY WINTER - - - 153

An unwholesome atmosphere—The Spirit of War is lacking—"In the Dug-outs"—Mr. Winston Churchill's Question—Peace Initiative of the Queen of Holland and the King of the Belgians—Franco-British Agreements governing Finance and Economic Co-ordination—A scandalous sitting in the Chamber—Expulsion of the Communist Deputy, M. Florimond Bonté—A Crisis imminent—M. Reynaud makes a "Premier's" Speech—Russia attacks Finland—The position of Italy—The French Yellow Book—M. Georges Bonnet says: "It is my rehabilitation"—M. Daladier thinks of making far-reaching changes in his Cabinet—His disastrous riding accident.

# Contents

II

CHAPTER

PAGE

## XIII. NEITHER AN ARMISTICE NOR A SEPARATE PEACE - - - - - 168

Successive stages of the Declaration forbidding Great Britain and France to enter upon Separate Negotiations for Armistice and Peace—Why M. Daladier deferred the Signing of it—The Supreme Council of December 19th.

## XIV. FALL OF M. DALADIER - - - - - 175

Melancholy end of the Finnish Campaign—The Secret Session of February 10th—"Come what may, and may God be my Judge!"—The Session of March 12th a bad one for M. Daladier—Ribbentrop makes things awkward for M. Georges Bonnet—Mr. Sumner Welles' Mission—M. Bonnet tells the American Visitor that there is a Peace Party in France—Secret Session of the Senate—M. Laval's attack on M. Daladier—Another Secret Session of the Chamber of Deputies—Fall of M. Daladier.

## XV. DRAMATIC BEGINNING OF THE PAUL REYNAUD CABINET - - - - - 189

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé"—Career and Character of M. Paul Reynaud—Visits and Consultations—M. Paul Reynaud and M. Daladier face to face—The Conversation as it ought to have been and as it was—From mistake to mistake—M. Mandel refuses the Ministry of the Interior—Interview between Daladier and Mandel—Reynaud sees Léon Blum—Marin excluded—The case of Guy la Chambre—M. Roy, Minister of the Interior—The President of the Republic grows impatient—The "Hinge" Group overlooked—Rage of M. Georges Bonnet at being dropped from the Cabinet—The Ministerial Statement of Policy—In Parliament the uneasy atmosphere of Great Crises—M. Reynaud's illusion—M. Léon Blum saves M. Reynaud—The Single Vote—Will the Radical Ministers resign?—They decide to stay.

## XVI. "I SHALL WIN THE WAR" - - - - - 214

M. Paul Reynaud's feverish activity—Who will be Secretary to the War Cabinet?—Colonel de Gaulle refuses and M. Baudouin is appointed—Why is M. Baudouin, a known defeatist, chosen for a War Cabinet?—M. Paul Reynaud's "presumption"—The Supreme War Council of March 26th—Conflict with M. Daladier—Relations between the two men grow bitter—M. Daladier thinks of leaving—Mr. Winston Churchill's warnings to the Neutrals—To the Rescue of Norway, invaded by Germany—The Battle for Iron—M. Paul Reynaud says to me: "I shall win the war"—The Expedition abandoned—M. Reynaud's illness—He draws up a Scheme for re-fashioning His Cabinet and others prepare diplomatic moves for him—M. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General at the Foreign Office, is condemned by Mme. de Portes and M. Baudouin.

## XVII. PAUL REYNAUD'S EVIL GENIUSES—A WOMAN 236

Hélène de Portes, née Rebuffet—The Enchantress tamed.

**XVIII. PAUL REYNAUD'S EVIL GENIUSES—PAUL BAUDOUIN - - - - - 242**

His origin: Inspection of Finance—His Manifesto in the *Revue de Paris*: the "Data of the French Problem"—Sympathy for Germany—Three Confidential Brochures—The Mirage of Peace—Fascist tendencies—The Catholic Mediterranean dream—Fear of the tide of revolution—"Peace Problem"—M. Baudouin's ascendancy over M. Paul Reynaud.

**XIX. M. REYNAUD AGAINST GAMELIN - - - - - 258**

Campaign against M. Paul Reynaud—Spanish ill-will—Diplomatic advance to Brussels—Letter to Signor Mussolini—Indictment against General Gamelin—Conflict with M. Daladier—Crisis probable, short of a miracle.

**XX. MAY 10TH, 1940. INVASION OF HOLLAND AND BELGIUM - - - - - 265**

The High Command decides to risk battle in Belgium—Cabinet Changes: M. Marin and M. Ybarnegaray in the Ministry—M. Daladier's anxiety—The Generalissimo's hour—Banco—Mr. Chamberlain hands on the Torch to Mr. Winston Churchill.

**XXI. THE PANIC OF MAY 16TH - - - - - 274**

M. Daladier's Uneasiness—The Front is Broken—The Commander-in-Chief, overcome, lets loose a wave of panic—Unexampled Scenes at a Cabinet Meeting attended by the Speakers of the two Houses—M. Paul Reynaud recovers himself—Sitting of the Chamber of Deputies—"We shall fight before Paris, in Paris!"—Mr. Winston Churchill's visit: "We shall be with you to the end."

**XXII. GEORGES MANDEL - - - - - 285**

M. Paul Reynaud makes Changes in His Cabinet—Pétain is called upon to serve as *cour*—M. Reynaud decides to become War Minister—M. Daladier goes to the Foreign Office, M. Mandel to the Ministry of the Interior—The Life of M. Mandel—The right-hand man of Georges Clemenceau—How Georges Mandel faced a Hostile Cabal in 1936.

**XXIII. M. LÉGER IS HOUNDED FROM OFFICE - - - - - 293**

The Portes-Baudouin intrigue proves too strong for M. Paul Reynaud to resist—First Breach in the Franco-British Alliance—A Comment by Signor Guariglia.

**XXIV. GENERAL WEYGAND, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF - 301**

General Weygand leaves Syria to become Commander-in-Chief—Mr. Winston Churchill proclaims his faith in the French genius for recovery—M. Paul Reynaud tells the Senate: "The Country is in danger"—Conversation with M. Paul Reynaud.

# Contents

13

## CHAPTER

PAGE

XXV.	THE CONSPIRACY BEGINS—CAPITULATION OF THE KING OF THE BELGIANS - - -	308
	A Minister denounces M. Baudouin's defeatism to M. Paul Reynaud—An Underground Campaign to regenerate France through Defeat—Capitulation of the King of the Belgians—General Weygand begins to weaken—Mastery of M. Georges Mandel.	
XXVI.	M. REYNAUD EXPELS M. DALADIER FROM HIS GOVERNMENT - - - - -	316
	Last negotiations with Italy—Conversation with M. Pierre Laval—An Air Squadron bombs Paris—M. Henry Béranger sees M. Paul Reynaud—Dramatic Council of Ministers—Statement by M. Daladier—I say good-bye to M. Daladier—Ministerial reshuffle—The King's Household.	
XXVII.	THE STAB IN THE BACK - - - - -	330
	General Weygand weakens—M. Paul Reynaud's excitable condition—Italy declares War—Mr. Winston Churchill's message—Mr. Roosevelt discloses in a speech his noble efforts to stop Mussolini short on the brink of war—A brief speech by M. Paul Reynaud—The Government leaves Paris for Tours.	
XXVIII.	THE DEPARTURE FROM PARIS—WEYGAND'S DEMAND - - - - -	342
	Fifteen hours from Paris to Tours—The throng on the road—General de Gaulle remonstrates—The Conspiracy gets under way—At the Court of the Prefecture at Tours—General Weygand demands that a request for an Armistice be sent—Marshal Pétain's dream—M. Camille Chautemps begins his noxious work—Quimper or Bordeaux?—Through the influence of Mme. de Portes it is to be Bordeaux.	
XXIX.	A CRUCIAL DAY - - - - -	353
	Arrival of Mr. Winston Churchill—A moving Conference with M. Paul Reynaud—Incredible scenes in the Hall of the Prefecture—Mme. de Portes wants an Armistice—M. Paul Reynaud says to me: "Capitulate? Never!"—The Message to Mr. Roosevelt an error—General Weygand renews his ultimatum—Duel of words between General Weygand and M. Mandel—Telephone conversation between M. Mandel and M. Langeron—"Do not yield!"—M. Paul Reynaud's disappointing statement.	
XXX.	EVE OF CATASTROPHE - - - - -	363
	M. Pierre Laval persuades Marshal Pétain that his hour is coming—M. Chautemps appoints himself recruiting officer of capitulation and devises a stratagem—M. Georges Mandel displays intense activity—M. Léon Blum's anguish—Alternating courage and depression of M. Paul Reynaud—Sir Ronald Campbell, a great Ambassador, a great Englishman, and a great friend of France—Mme. Hélène de Portes passes all bounds—M. Mandel warns the Council of Ministers that on no account will he dishonour himself—Pessimistic estimate of the voting—What MM. Albert Lebrun, Jeanneney, Herriot, and Paul Reynaud ought, but fail, to say.	



## CHAPTER

PAGE

## XXXI. THE TRAGEDY REACHES ITS END - - 377

A Mournful Day—Marshal Pétain decides to precipitate surrender—Mr. Winston Churchill's sensational proposal of union between Great Britain and France—General de Gaulle telephones to M. Paul Reynaud from London—An evening of confusion—The Council of Ministers votes in favour of Capitulation—M. Paul Reynaud resigns—Marshal Pétain forms the new Government.

## XXXII. FAREWELL ! - - - - 388

M. Pomaret's glory—Indecent joy—An injustice towards M. Georges Bonnet—A last conversation with Georges Mandel—My reasons for leaving France—M. Baudouin reassures the British Ambassador about the fate of the French Fleet—The request for an Armistice is sent—Marshal Pétain announces the Capitulation over the wireless—General Debeney's Memories—The band plays the Marseillaise: "The Day of Glory"—Arrest of M. Mandel—Marshal Pétain apologises to him—Farewell, Mandel! Farewell, my country!—Departure.

## XXXIII. " CONSUMMATUM EST " - - - - 400

M. Baudouin's Promises—The " Massilia " Trap—The Bordeaux Government does not keep its promises in the matter of the French Fleet—General Huntziger at Rethondes and Rome—Signing of the Armistice—The British Ambassador leaves Bordeaux.

## EPILOGUE—JUDGMENTS - - - 408

The case of M. Reynaud—Opprobrium of Mme. de Portes and M. Baudouin—General Weygand—The Mystery of Admiral Darlan—M. Camille Chautemps, Grave-digger of the Third Republic—M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot do not know the secret of being heroes—The Disappearance of M. Albert Lebrun—M. Pierre Laval, hero of the Capitulation—Before the Statue of Foch.

## Preface

WHY, how did I write this book?

On June 21st last I arrived in London, coming from Bordeaux, which I had left on the 17th, after the resignation of the Reynaud Cabinet and the formation of Marshal Pétain's. These two events alike signified that the new Government, going back on the signature put by M. Paul Reynaud on March 28th in the name of France at the foot of a solemn declaration, was going to enter into separate negotiations for an armistice and a peace with the Common Enemy.

I was coming to London, provided with a correct passport, whatever the liars of Bordeaux who have become the liars of Vichy may have said about it, and before such a journey was pronounced a crime. I was coming, I have stated and I state it again, in order to pursue, to the full extent of a courage which has ceased to fear anything, the struggle against Germany, the struggle for the liberation of my country, the struggle for the preservation and protection of the British Empire, the Ally of France.

Why should I not acknowledge that my heart was almost broken when I inflicted on myself the duty of exile? Why should I not confess that sobs tore me when in a hotel lounge I read the ignominious terms of the Armistice? I dared scarcely look Englishmen, friends old and new, in the face when they asked me, yet with infinite delicacy: "How could this have happened?"

If there should be some unable to understand my feelings, well, I must leave it at that!

One day, while scanning the newspapers with the fear of finding in them a fresh cause for shame, I came to a halt

over a signature "Robert Vansittart" at the foot of a poem entitled: "1904-1940."

I knew Sir Robert Vansittart, I knew that he was, in Great Britain, the man most fully representative of the Anglo-French alliance. Eagerly I read the twenty poignant lines in which his wounded heart gave vent to its grief and bitterness.

I read them several times. Re-reading them again to-day they cause me no less emotion, so true is it that great thoughts and profound feelings are qualities essential to masterpieces.

Here is the text of the poem, which will stand in future anthologies as one of the most lovely cries of grief torn from the soul of a poet:

## 1904—1940

Was I not faithful to you from the first ?  
When have I ever failed you since my youth ?  
I loved without illusion, knew the worst,  
But felt the best was nearer to the truth.

You were indulgent, too, and open-eyed  
To the shortcomings I was frank to own,  
So we were mingled, destined side by side  
To face a world we could not face alone.

Did you keep faith with me ? When all was well  
Yes : but I clave to you when all was not.  
And when temptation touched your citadel,  
Your weakness won again, and you forgot. . . .

Forgot your Self, and freedom and your friends,  
Even interest : and now our vaunted glow  
Becomes a blush, as the long story ends  
In sorry separation at Bordeaux.

You hate me now : you will not hate me less  
If I go on unshaken by your fall,  
If *for your sake*, devoid of bitterness,  
I face the world without you after all.

ROBERT VANSITTART.

No one will be surprised at my emotion, especially if he goes back in thought to the date when the poem was published. I was so much shaken by it that I am anxious to reply publicly to it, not to complain of its painful reproaches but to echo them. I understood too well the right to bitterness that thirty-six years of unswerving friendship might claim.

How should I not have understood, I, who might borrow the first line of his poem and say to him: "Was I not faithful to you from the first?"

He had the more reason to be implacable—and was not—because no one had more fully and more ably made himself among his compatriots the defender, the standard-bearer and the symbol of the Alliance of our two peoples. He was therefore a thousand times right when he cried shame on us in four verses for leaving his country alone to confront the world, and hurled at us that proud challenge: "if for your sake, etc. . . ."

It was while pondering over this challenge and over the overwhelming questions inspired in him by the shameful event of Bordeaux, that I resolved to write what I know, what I have seen, what I have heard, what I have understood of all that has brought France to such a pass.

At the same time as I inform him of all this, if he reads my book, I thank him for it.

I trust no one will imagine that I want to write the history of the war or of part of it, or even just the history of the capitulation.

The impartial history of the war up to the moment when France ceased to participate in it will demand, together with a lapse of time, the comparison and collation of diplomatic dispatches, testimonies and military documents. More than that, it can only be written by men free from partisan passions and animated by a real spirit of equity—which, in advance, stamps the Riom investigations with suspicion. At best these can only serve to collect documents which, moreover, are subject to revision.

But the men of Vichy who decided on the judicial inquiry and the trial are not free. They are dependent on enemy Governments who have a prime interest in accusing and condemning all Frenchmen who gave proof of a patriotic will, hostile to their designs. They have a crime on their consciences, too, and, in the hope of causing it to be forgotten or forgiven, they cannot but seek to saddle others than themselves with the burden of responsibility for the war. The men of Vichy are performing an act of submission to the conquerors, an act of personal policy and, against other Frenchmen, of mean revenge: but not an act of justice or of truth.

Nor do I bring truth. I do not possess it. Can anyone be in possession of it for a long while yet? I bring *some* truths, that is to say the contribution of direct evidence on many essential points, and of evidence, indirect but fed from pure and reliable sources, concerning a certain number of men and facts.

At all times, for more than half a century, I have been mixed up in the political life of my country. I have been honoured with the confidence of certain Statesmen and leading personalities in the political and administrative life of France, without necessarily sharing all their views. They spoke frankly in my presence, and sometimes secrets escaped from their lips, because they knew that, in the disclosures they made, I could distinguish without difficulty between those of which I might avail myself with advantage to the country, and those that must be lodged inviolate in my memory.

This contribution of mine is at the same time a statement in evidence, in so far as it is severe, indulgent or complimentary towards certain people, great or unimportant, whom I am obliged to fit into the course of events with which they were associated.

Unlike the men who set the trials in action, I have no intention of seeking out those responsible for the war. From the very start this search is, for me, in itself criminal

folly and injustice. The man responsible for the war is not in France, he is in Berlin. His name is Hitler. He is also called Germany, which is the same thing. The share of indirect responsibility which can be laid at the door of Frenchmen, because their weakness, their lack of foresight and their policy gave a sanction to the audacity of the Criminal in Chief—this share will appear from force of circumstances in my book as will indications of the responsibility for the defeat and, later, for the collapse. But I would not have undertaken this task with the special object of making them plain.

On the other hand, I did have, and still have, I confess and indeed proclaim, the earnest desire to provide all the information that has come to me which serves to fix on its authors the responsibility for the Bordeaux capitulation.

A defeat may be no more than an accident, a collapse no more than a misfortune ; the capitulation of Bordeaux, the repudiation of the signature of France, the prostration before the Conqueror and the abandonment of the Empire are neither accidents nor misfortunes : they are dishonour, a dishonour which oppresses and will not cease to oppress my spirit and my heart, with those of so many other Frenchmen, until France has effaced this stain from her Flag.

I make a point of declaring here and now, however, that I rule out one name : that of Marshal Pétain, who has been imposed upon, deceived, gulled. He is a victim whom we must pity.

With regard to the others, I have cross-examined myself. Am I actuated by hatred, desire for vengeance, or simply by dislike and bias? No! There are some on whose firmness I counted implicitly until the moment when I saw it waver. There are others against whom my statements and inferences will seem like indictments. But in my mind I had nothing against them, my acquaintance with them being of the slightest. Finally, there are some who have only assumed importance through their complicity.

## Preface

21

I have only to confess the humiliation which has obsessed me since the sinister days of Tours and Bordeaux, especially since that night of June 16th when the resignation of M. Paul Reynaud and the advent of the new Pétain Ministry put the finishing touch to the downfall, the momentary downfall, of my country.

In presenting these sincere and burning pages to the British people I say to them: "They are yours! Do not refuse them, even if my testimony and my judgments of this or that man, and on this or that point cause you disillusionment or surprise. They come from a man who will never in his love be able to separate your nation and his own."

ELIE J. BOIS.





## Chapter I

### “ How and Why ? ”

#### SIGNIFICANT DATES—A CHAIN OF CAUSES AND A CONJUNCTION OF TREACHERIES

At the beginning of this work which, while a combatant book, is before everything else a historical document, it is fitting to inscribe, as it were like luminous letters on a sign post at main road junctions, some of the essential dates which stand out as landmarks in the history of the war, willed, prepared, decreed and planned, as Sir Nevile Henderson put it, by Adolf Hitler.

August 21st, 1939. Announcement of the German-Russian pact.

August 23rd. Delivery of a message to Hitler from Mr. Chamberlain.

August 26th. Letter of M. Daladier to Adolf Hitler.

September 1st. Invasion of Poland by Germany.

September 1st. Delivery by Sir Nevile Henderson in the name of the British Government and by M. Coulondre in the name of the French Government of a note warning the German Minister for Foreign Affairs that Great Britain and France would fulfil their obligations towards Poland if the German Government did not suspend its aggressive action against her.

September 2nd. General mobilisation in France.

September 3rd. Declaration of a state of war between France and Great Britain on the one hand, and Germany on the other.

December 1st. Russo-Finnish war.

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

February 21st, 1940. Downfall of the French Communist deputies.

March 13th. Signing of peace between the Soviets and Finland.

March 20th. Resignation of M. Daladier.

March 21st-22nd. Forming of the Reynaud Cabinet.

April 9th. Invasion of Denmark and Norway.

May 2nd. Withdrawal of the British and French troops from south of Trondheim.

May 10th. Invasion of Holland and Belgium. Resignation of Mr. Chamberlain. Investiture of Mr. Winston Churchill.

May 16th. Piercing of the French front. Alarm in Paris.

May 18th. Ministerial changes in France.

May 19th. Weygand replaces Gamelin.

May 28th. Capitulation of King Leopold.

June 6th. Ministerial changes in France. Resignation of M. Daladier.

June 10th. Entry of Italy into the war. Appeal of M. Reynaud to Mr. Roosevelt. Evacuation from Narvik.

June 11th. Departure of French Government for Tours.

June 12th and 13th. Council of Ministers at Tours. General Weygand calls for an armistice. Mr. Churchill comes to Tours.

June 14th. Departure of French Government for Bordeaux.

June 16th. M. Reynaud's resignation and replacement by Marshal Pétain who asks Germany to state her conditions of peace.

June 21st. Ceremony at Rethondes.

June 23rd. Signing of the Franco-German armistice at Rethondes.

June 24th. Signing of the Franco-Italian armistice in Rome.

June 25th. Cessation of hostilities between France, Germany and Italy.

Six of these dates are, so to speak, key dates or causal

dates, for however sensational the others may be, it is these six that determined them.

Let us pick them out in chronological order :

August 21st, 1939. Announcement of the German-Soviet pact.

September 1st. Invasion of Poland by Germany.

March 20th, 1940. Resignation of M. Daladier.

March 21st-22nd. Reynaud Ministry.

May 10th. German offensive by the invasion of Belgium and Holland.

June 16th. Resignation of the Reynaud Cabinet in consequence of the decision of the French Council of Ministers to ask Hitler his conditions of peace.

It is within the framework of these dates that we shall see the honour of France played fast and loose with in conditions that no man could foresee, and between May 10th and June 16th we shall witness chiefly the unrolling, with the rapidity of a cinematographic dream, of events each one of which would in itself belong to the domain of the extraordinary, whilst their sum total constitutes one of the most amazing catastrophes in human history.

Within less than two months of the invasion of Belgium and Holland and of the German offensive which followed from it, not only had the front held by the French army, the Belgian army and the British Expeditionary Force been broken, not only had the King of the Belgians capitulated, not only had almost the whole of France been overrun, not only had the French Government, in total disregard of the word given by its predecessor, begged for an armistice, accepted its humiliating conditions and delivered itself over, bound hand and foot, to the victorious enemy and the belligerents of the twelfth hour, but the men who, under the horsewhip of Hitler and the protection of Mussolini, directed, if one can call it directing, the destinies of France, had completed the rupture with their friend, with England, with their companions in the struggle, and thrown down the political edifice of the Nation to substitute

for it a fresh structure in conformity with German Nazism and Italian Fascism !

To stir up the memory of these shattering events is to shudder ! One is tempted to murmur : " Can it be true ? Surely it is a nightmare ? " But, alas ! for the pitiful reality, the answer is : " It is true." Then the how and the why rise up inexorably before one's intelligence. One wants to understand and, in order to understand, to know !

When, by an effort of memory, one takes in the last twenty years, explanations, more or less well founded, come crowding in : but not a single one is sufficient by itself.

That the insolent revival of Pan-Germanism across the Rhine was due to differences of opinion between the politicians of Great Britain and France over the right attitude to adopt towards the recent enemy : that, in particular, when Hitler denounced the Locarno Pact and reoccupied the demilitarised Rhineland, the inconceivable weakness of the British and French Governments in the matter dispelled all his scruples and fears, is only too true, and he himself cried it aloud to Chancellor Schuschnigg in that dramatic interview at Berchtesgaden before the *Anschluss* : " You believe that France and England will move. They did not move on March 7th, 1936."

That the rivalries, differences, conflicts and hatreds between the States formed from the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, instead of being appeased and, if necessary, firmly settled by the Chancelleries of London and Paris, were allowed to have free play and so permit the resurrection of Imperialist Germany at their expense—and ours—may well be the subject which, in the whole period between the two wars, will most intrigue the historian of the future.

That, since the victory of 1918, France allowed herself, without any real counter-motion, to descend a slope of moral decadence : that the French political system, which had no inherent flaws in it, was corrupted in its application

by the fault of electors, elected and the executive : that, more particularly, successive French Governments, yielding to the wave of complacent optimism and unalloyed pacifism which submerged all the democracies, allowed her military machine little by little to grow rusty : that political parties perverted opinion by always telling the public of its rights and never of its duties : that the public, swept away in an impetuous current of demagogy, virtually lost its national sense, even to the extent of displaying an indecent sense of well-being, on the morrow of the Munich agreements, which were only excusable on the ground of the Western democracies' lack of preparedness : that Communist, Hitlerian and ultra-Conservative propaganda poisoned the soul of France, and that the efforts at recovery in the military and aerial field, as in the moral, were not sufficiently energetic at a time when they should have been remorseless—all this is but too glaringly apparent.

There is, then, not one cause, but a chain of causes. Even this chain, however, would not have sufficed, had there not arisen in the last three months a veritable conjunction of treacheries, which were not all deliberate, nor even invariably connected with one another, but which by their simultaneous occurrence had all the effect of a conspiracy.

Finally, it is impossible to appreciate the appalling events that took place between May 10th and June 16th without having a clear idea of the connection between such happenings as the Finnish adventure or the failure in Norway, and the vicissitudes of French internal policy. Moreover, it is impossible to understand this connection unless one brings a clear, unshaded light to bear on French political circles and on the psychology of the leading figures who have moved about within them since the declaration of war, and who will find the gravest circumstances rise up to accuse them.

## Chapter II

### Hitler Heralds the War. His Pact with Moscow

IF THE RUSSO-GERMAN PACT HAD NOT BEEN SIGNED  
—HOW I LEARNED AT BURGOS OF THE SIGNING OF  
THE PACT—A SAYING OF M. JEANNENEY

IT is not without reason that I put the announcement of the Russo-German pact at the head of the list of "chief dates" in the war declared by Germany on September 1st, 1939. Without having recourse to a lengthy setting forth of argument, let us proceed in the manner of the Greek philosophers by questions which need no answers, since they carry them in themselves.

If the pact announced on the 21st and signed on the 23rd of August had been concluded, not between Germany and the Soviet Union, but between Russia and the Entente Cordiale, would not Hitler and Ribbentrop have thought twice before joyfully entering upon war with Poland? Again if, notwithstanding, they had undertaken it, would not the Franco-British blockade have been more effective? Would not the morale of the French army have been greatly strengthened by it? Would not the course of the military operations have been profoundly altered? Would not the French Army of the East, which was never called upon to intervene, have provided both military and material support for a group of Turkish, Roumanian, Yugo-Slav and Greek armies? Would not Signor Mussolini have been led to reconsider his foreign policy in the light of the Florentine historian's precept: "The Italian statesman should always pray to be on the side of the strongest, and contrive matters so that he actually may be"? Would

he not have discovered in his changing principles and in the sacred egoism which is his rule, the justification for a return to the stipulations of Stresa? And if he had been blind enough, which I doubt, to remain faithful to the Berlin-Rome axis, would not the probably speedy success of a Franco-British expedition to Italy have been catastrophic for him and his régime? At the same time would not this success have had an important, if not a decisive influence on the fate of the war?

Did not Hitler, in his cogitations at Berchtesgaden, ask himself these very questions? Did not the Führer, as M. Coulondre sent word to Paris on June 1st in a report based on information he had received from a high official of the Wilhelmstrasse—did not Hitler ask General Keitel and General Brauchitsch: "*Whether a general conflict would turn to the advantage of Germany?*" And did they not reply that: "*In the event of Germany having to fight against Russia she would have little chance of winning the war*"?

Was it not unofficially notorious among the *entourage* of Herr von Ribbentrop, in the spring of 1939, that the German Foreign Minister was inclining towards the destruction of the Polish State by a partition between Russia and the Reich? Did he not cherish then—and that while the interminable Anglo-Russian negotiations were proceeding—"*the hope of getting the Russians on his side, or at least of seeing them remain aloof from the group formed under the auspices of England and France*"?

Did not Herr von Ribbentrop, who had only to have search made in the archives of the Wilhelmstrasse, put before Hitler's eyes all Bismarck's arguments in favour of the policy of the three Emperors? Did he not point out to the Führer that, if anti-communism was, for his benefit, an excellent pretext for international propaganda and action, he would, nevertheless, be wrong to sacrifice to it the safety and the triumph of Nazi Germany? If, as is possible, Hitler felt some repugnance about putting his



hand in that of Stalin, did he not after due consideration resign himself to it in the sacred name of *raison d'Etat*, by convincing himself that the signing of the Russo-German pact would, as its immediate result, put Great Britain and France out of countenance, and make them hesitate to keep their pledges to Poland? Finally, did he not promise himself that, no longer having anything to fear on his Eastern frontier, he would be much better placed, if they *did* keep their pledges, to beat them and bring them to capitulation? That done, what was there to prevent him revenging himself on the Soviets for having earlier put him under the necessity of coming to an agreement with them?

I shall remember all my life how I heard of the conclusion of the Russo-German pact. . . . It was in Spain, which I was passing through hurriedly, for already the clouds were piling up on the diplomatic horizon, and in the sky flashes of lightning announced the thunderbolt. I had just reached Burgos, where I had an appointment with a very great gentleman who was attached to the Ministry of Propaganda. We had scarcely exchanged the opening words that courtesy demands, when he asked me gravely: "What do you think of the pact with the Russians?"

The French and British military mission had only recently arrived in Moscow to round off the political understanding between M. Molotov, Sir William Seeds and M. Naggiar.

Without further reflection, and as much from conviction as to put myself on a fair footing with an opponent of Bolshevism, I answered: "I have no liking for Russia, white or red. I consider, however, that an agreement with the Moscow Government, independently of all ideology, is a useful insurance premium for us and for them."

The smooth skin of my young companion's face puckered into shallow wrinkles as he smiled sadly on realising my failure to understand.

"I am talking," he contradicted gently, "of the pact

Herr von Ribbentrop is signing to-day in Moscow. Didn't you know? "

I could scarcely be aware of it for, since my arrival in the Iberian Peninsula I had been, for lack of a telephone, cut off from all communication with France, and I did not know that the telegrams, sent from Paris to warn and recall me, were following me about from town to town, arriving by diabolical coincidence just after my departure.

"No," I confessed to Señor Merry del Val. "And you've given me a pretty unpleasant shock!"

I should think he had! Certainly I had often considered a Stalin-Hitler understanding possible. Only a few weeks earlier, in an article in the *Petit Parisien*, written on my return from a tour of investigation in London, I had expressed the apprehension which the Foreign Office might well feel lest some intrigue with the Germans should be concealed beneath the cloak of Soviet intransigence.

Lord Halifax had made a stop in Paris two weeks previously on his way to Geneva. There had been a little conference between him, M. Daladier and M. Bonnet, prior to the departure of the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain and France for the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations.

M. Daladier, on the strength of information received from Munich and relating to secret Russo-German negotiations, had drawn the attention of Lord Halifax to the grave risk of leaving "*Russia exposed to German intrigues, with the consequent temptation for the Reich to discount a hold over Russia in favour of an economic agreement, or by some other form of underhand dealing.*"

The French Secretary General of Foreign Affairs had, further, stressed the presence at the Wilhelmstrasse of a school favourable to Russo-German understanding, and at the Pont aux Chantres\* of a pro-German clan. In seeking a formula which might settle the pledges of mutual assist-

\* The Pont aux Chantres: the address of the Russian Foreign Ministry in Leningrad.

ance in an Anglo-Franco-Russian agreement, Lord Halifax had, for his part, shown that he was squarely facing the danger, in case of war, of a neutral and, above all, of a hostile Russia.

I had been aware of these exchanges of views and in an article, without actually alluding to them, which at that time would have been dangerously indiscreet, I had, in order to dot the *i*'s, invoked the history of Russo-German relations, recalling the Bjorkoë interview of 1905, when the ex-Kaiser sought to persuade Nicholas II to form a *bloc* against England, and to draw France into it. I had even added with apprehensive foreknowledge:

*"It is in vain for Hitler to have founded his political fortune as much on the battle against Bolshevism as on revenge against France. It is idle for him to have covered bellicose enterprises with an anti-komintern cloak: he would not find it embarrassing to come to a temporary understanding with Moscow, if to do so would result in keeping the Muscovite bloc out of the game in progress between him (Hitler) and the Franco-British alliance."*

This recollection came back to my mind while Señor Merry del Val, reflecting the trend of the news of German origin which he had kindly just summarised for me, ended with this question, "Don't you think that the Dantzig affair is now settled?" "Settled?" I murmured. "Can we tell what will be the reactions to the military and diplomatic victory that Hitler has just won on the battlefield of the Chancelleries? What will they be in Poland? I don't know. In France and Great Britain? From the point of view of alliances, that will depend on Poland herself. From other points of view, I wonder how far Hitler's renunciation of all his anti-Soviet propaganda will influence French opinion, on the Left against the Soviets, on the Right against Hitler himself? And you, yourself," I emphasised, striving to penetrate his thoughts, "what can you say now of the man who has made his political fortune by standing up as a rampart against Bolshevism?"

But not wishing to embarrass him in any way, I did not allow him to answer. "All that remains for me to do," I went on, "is to find the quickest means of getting back to Paris. Good-bye, Spain! Good-bye, Portugal!"

The aeroplane which brought me back to France was the last of the German line to fly from Lisbon to Marignane. Even so, it all but left us at Madrid, then at Barcelona, and only continued its journey after having received a radiogram from the German authorities, ordering it to bring back to Stuttgart the German pilots stationed at the Marseilles airport.

This detail, superficially insignificant, spoke more eloquently than words of the probability of war, and I was not surprised, on the very day of my return to Paris, to hear M. Bonnet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Premier, M. Daladier himself, confess their fears: nor was I taken aback when a high official said to me gravely: "War seems inevitable, short of a change of mind on Hitler's part. But he will not make it, for he does not believe in the sincerity of our faithfulness to our alliances."

It was on this afternoon (August 26th) that M. Edouard Daladier, alive to the threat which was advancing with giant strides over Europe, wrote to the German Chancellor the moving letter in which he entreated him not to begin "*a war of destruction without a last attempt at peaceful settlement having taken place between Germany and Poland.*"

On leaving the Ministry of War, I found myself face to face with the President of the Senate, M. Jeanneney, whose attitude at any moment will never be untrue to the dignity of the nation. A native of Franche-Comté, severe, almost frowning of face, he has only been a member of one Government, that of Georges Clemenceau during the war, and even then only in the capacity of an ordinary under-Secretary of State attached to the Premier. He was at that time one of the triumvirate of collaborators who mounted guard round the "Tiger," absorbed his fire and handed it on from top to bottom of the French hierarchy: the

## 34 Truth on the Tragedy of France

three were Jeanneney, General Mordacq and Georges Mandel.

Having become the second personage in the State, as President of the Upper House, he embodied there will to action, rigid adherence to republican principles and uncompromising patriotism. A man of few words, he confined himself to saying to me : “ *The whole of France must now show the mentality that prevailed in this building twenty-two years ago.* ”

And as, with the alertness of a young man, he prepared to mount the steps leading to the War Ministry, he threw over his shoulder the words : “ That’s what I’ve come to say here ! ”

Would to God that his prayer had been heard and followed by the whole nation !

## Chapter III

### The Responsibility for the War

MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S STINGING RETORT TO HERR VON  
RIBBENTROP — FRANCO-BRITISH CONFERENCE IN  
PARIS—A MEMORABLE DOCUMENT—AN ACCUSATION

It was, therefore, on August 21st, 1939, that the loud speakers of the Radio and the headlines of the Press, announcing the conclusion of the Russo-German pact, indirectly forewarned the world that Hitler was about to let loose the dogs of war, and that Stalin would either aid him or, at least, not stand in his way. Those in the know had no doubts on that score: the rest were not long in finding out: indeed, the evidence was such that despite the repeated attempts of Hitler and Ribbentrop to place their guilt on the shoulders of others, I felt justified, when I planned this book, in refraining, if not from referring to it, at least from going to great lengths to prove their joint responsibility.

If Messrs. Hitler and Ribbentrop, or any other of the evil knights of the most brazen order of international gangsters the world has ever seen, had confined themselves to weaving crowns of innocence to set on their own heads, there would be no need to do more than smile and pass on. But now that it is from my Country that they seek their rehabilitation, now that the sorry Government which holds France in yoke makes itself their accomplice, and prepares, in order to whitewash them by means of a travesty of justice, to accuse the French Prime Minister of September, 1939, more than that, to accuse the ally of France, Great Britain—then I beg leave to cry a halt.

It needs no microscope to see through this precious plan. It is plain enough. After the Treaty of Versailles, the main effort of the German campaign of revenge had been directed against the dogma of German responsibility for the war of 1914. In making the war-guilt clause their target, the marksmen aimed at everything which followed from the guilt acknowledged by the signature of their plenipotentiaries, in other words, at everything which could be classed as a punishment and, more especially, at reparations. Whatever exaltation the Germans, and notably the Nazi leaders, have made elsewhere of the use of force and of the *virtue of war*, whether from real conviction or with the idea of galvanising the spirit of the mass of their people, they have always made it a point of honour to rid themselves, as of a leaden cloak too heavy for their shoulders, of the responsibility for the war of 1914 : as for the war of 1939, though they began to work for it long ago, they have never ceased their endeavours to throw the blame for it on the " Western democracies," and, in particular, on Great Britain. By ordering the hapless men of Vichy and the pseudo-judges of Riom to take proceedings against certain individuals, whom they wish first to defame and then to destroy, they aim at attacking Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax through M. Daladier, at condemning Mr. Winston Churchill by putting M. Mandel in the dock, and at arraigning England by bringing France to trial.

In Dantzig at the end of October, 1939, when the Polish campaign was drawing to a close, Herr von Ribbentrop, in a venomous harangue, had already sought to dissociate France from Great Britain, and asserted that the war had been imposed on the French people by the British Government. I should be greatly surprised if his cheek does not still bear the trace of the blow administered by Mr. Neville Chamberlain. The ex-Premier was far from being without enemies in the House of Commons, but he had none on October 26th, when, hurling back the accusation against England, he remarked dryly : " The whole world knows

that it is not true," and then raised his voice to lash Ribbentrop with this reply: "One of the questions which historians of the future will have to examine will be to determine how far this great tragedy of our time was due to the inability of von Ribbentrop to understand either the politics or the character of the English people."

The House of Commons was unanimous in approval of this denunciation.

Will it be urged that all this is fine fencing but no proof? I might answer that the worth of a word corresponds to the worth of the man who speaks it, and that there are men and spoken words above suspicion: but things being as they are, I am going to give myself the pleasure of bringing down the hammer blows of certain facts and certain testimonies on the skulls of the Public Prosecutors of Auvergne.

Without going back to the Deluge, that is, to that long period of which Munich (September, 1938) was the culminating point, and during which both in France and in England, and perhaps in England even more than in France, long-suffering forbearance with regard to the Germany of Hitler was carried—we must now acknowledge—to the point of blindness, there was no tactful step, no gentle hint and finally no plain warning which was not tried in the effort to appease the truculent voracity of the Führer.

I might disclose, for instance, that at the meeting in Paris in June, 1939, at which, as I mentioned,\* relations with Russia were discussed, Lord Halifax, M. Bonnet and their experts devoted a good deal of time to considering: "How the coming months might best be used to promote a favourable solution of the Dantzic problem." In fact, they went to the length of debating whether it might not be possible to take as their starting point: "The idea formulated by Hitler himself of Dantzic as a Free City within the Reich," and contemplated: "A régime involving

\* See Chapter II.



the maintenance of Dantzic as a Free City in the sense that it could not be fortified or occupied by troops, and with substantial concessions in administration, including even a representative in the Reich." Colonel Beck "had let it be understood that he was ready to concede Germany much in the matter of the internal administration of the city, and also in its external relations."

All this, however, whatever might be its value, or that of many other things, had already vanished into the dusk of the past at the date of the Russo-German pact which, owing to its documentary importance and its immediate consequences, I chose as my starting point.

Mr. Chamberlain was quick to grasp its implications, and as early as August 22nd he drew up a despatch, the reading of which, in the English Blue Book, constitutes in the light of after events a damning accusation against the Führer, to whom Sir Nevile Henderson handed it on the afternoon of August 23rd. Certain passages of it appeared, perhaps, too mild and too conciliatory amid the fever which held Europe breathless with suspense, but with the passing of time the mildness of the words and the wish to conciliate evident in the suggestions have assumed the greatest value, since they condemn the vague, lying and wholly negative response of the Master of the Reich, and reveal to how great an extent Great Britain, through the voice of Mr. Chamberlain, and France, through that of M. Daladier, toiled and struggled to avert from their peoples the threatened scourge of war.

On this ground, therefore, I think it necessary, without fear of labouring this presentation of events in true perspective, to reproduce this memorable document which was translated and published in the German White Book.

# The Responsibility for the War 39

## LETTER OF AUGUST 22nd, 1939, FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE GERMAN CHANCELLOR.

10, DOWNING STREET,

August 22nd, 1939.

"YOUR EXCELLENCY,

"Your Excellency will have already heard of certain measures taken by His Majesty's Government, and announced in the Press and on the wireless this morning.

"These steps have, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, been rendered necessary by the military movements which have been reported from Germany, and by the fact *that apparently the announcement of a German-Soviet Agreement is taken in some quarters in Berlin to indicate that intervention by Great Britain on behalf of Poland is no longer a contingency that need be reckoned with.* No greater mistake could be made. Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet Agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly, and which they are determined to fulfil.

"It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in that allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved *that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding.*

"If the case should arise, *they are resolved, and prepared, to employ without delay all the forces at their command, and it is impossible to foresee the end of hostilities once engaged. It would be a dangerous illusion to think that, if war once starts, it will come to an early end even if a success on any one of the several fronts on which it will be engaged should have been secured.*

" Having thus made our position perfectly clear, I wish to repeat to you my conviction that war between out two peoples would be the greatest calamity that could occur. I am certain that it is desired neither by our people, nor by yours, and I cannot see that there is anything in the questions arising between Germany and Poland which could not and should not be resolved without the use of force, if only a situation of confidence could be restored to enable discussions to be carried on in an atmosphere different from that which prevails to-day.

" We have been, and at all times will be, ready to assist in creating conditions in which such negotiations could take place, and in which it might be possible concurrently to discuss the wider problems affecting the future of international relations, including matters of interest to us and to you.

" The difficulties in the way of any peaceful discussion in the present state of tension are, however, obvious, and the longer that tension is maintained, the harder will it be for reason to prevail.

" These difficulties, however, might be mitigated, if not removed, provided that there could be for an initial period a truce on both sides—and indeed on all sides—to press polemics and to all incitement.

" If such a truce could be arranged, then, at the end of that period, during which steps could be taken to examine and deal with complaints made by either side as to the treatment of minorities, it is reasonable to hope that suitable conditions might have been established for direct negotiations between Germany and Poland upon the issues between them (with the aid of a neutral intermediary if both sides should think that that would be helpful).

" But I am bound to say that there would be slender hope of bringing such negotiations to successful issue unless it were understood beforehand that any settlement reached would, when concluded, be guaranteed by other Powers. His Majesty's Government would be ready, if

## The Responsibility for the War 41

desired, to make such contribution as they could to the effective operation of such guarantees.

"At this moment I confess I can see no other way to avoid a catastrophe that will involve Europe in war.

"In view of the grave consequences to humanity, which may follow from the action of their rulers, I trust that Your Excellency will weigh with the utmost deliberations the considerations which I have put before you.

Yours sincerely,  
NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN."

In the course of the interview at which Sir Neville Henderson handed this letter to Hitler, the German Chancellor, amid his customary welter of arrogant assertions, threats, imprecations and flatteries, gave expression to his inmost thoughts by remarking that: "He preferred to make war at 50 rather than at the age of 55 or 60."

After this cry from the heart it was no longer possible to hope. Sir Neville Henderson came away from his conversation with Hitler *with the feeling that the Russian pact had, in the Chancellor's opinion, created a situation favourable to his plans*, and with the impression that: "Although he spoke of his artistic tastes and his eager desire to satisfy them, the corporal of the last war was still more desirous of showing what he could do as a conquering generalissimo in the next."

Despite an apparent lightening of the clouds for forty-eight hours, all attempts to induce the German Government to negotiate with Poland remained vain. Hitler did not intend to negotiate. He meant to impose his conditions. "*His army was ready,*" the British Ambassador in Berlin was to say later. "*Poland was to be taught a lesson. She must either accept or take a thrashing.*"

This considered opinion is all the more valuable for coming from one of the chief actors in the drama, and for the reason that, until the day when the scales fell from his

eyes, Sir Nevile Henderson, who had originally gone to Germany with the fixed intention of bettering Anglo-German relations, had at first viewed Hitler and Nazism with, as he was not ashamed to admit, an ingenuous trustfulness. "*Felix culpa*," to use the ecclesiastical phrase, since, his momentary blindness having once disappeared after the outrage on Czecho-Slovakia of March 15th, 1939, he subsequently distinguished the more clearly the true colours of Nazism and the real face of Hitler.

I should limit myself to this rapid reminder of the principal facts and testimonies, and would content myself with referring the reader in quest of further enlightenment to Sir Nevile Henderson's report, to the Yellow Book, to the speeches of M. Daladier and Mr. Chamberlain and to many other sources, if there had not come from Vichy the following precise and categorical accusation :

*"On August 31st, 1939, Signor Mussolini suggested to the British, French and German Governments that a conference should be held on September 5th to seek a formula for settling the German-Polish conflict. This proposal might very well have led to the preservation of peace if the British Government had not made it come to nothing."*

How much is this accusation worth? First on its face value, and then on the authority of the man or men who put it forward? The questions can be more satisfactorily answered if we take the two factors and consider them separately: the accusation itself—and the men who made it.

## Chapter IV

### Signor Mussolini's Trap

MUSSOLINI'S PROPOSAL TO HOLD A CONFERENCE WAS A TRAP PREPARED IN AGREEMENT WITH HITLER—THE PROOF OF THIS IS DISCUSSED BY REFERENCE TO A GERMAN WHITE BOOK—A STATEMENT BY MR. CHAMBERLAIN—HITLER WAS INTENT ON WAR

By means of the conference which Mussolini proposed to hold on September 5th, was it possible to stop the war begun by Hitler's orders on September 1st, 1939?

That is the problem we have to solve. What were the terms of Mussolini's suggestion? Here is the text of it as given at 1.0 p.m. on August 31st by Count Ciano to M. François Poncet and Sir Percy Loraine, Ambassadors of France and Great Britain in Rome.

*Signor Mussolini offers, if France and England agree, to invite Germany to a conference to be held on September 5th, at which the present difficulties arising from the Treaty of Versailles would be examined.*

At once, a preliminary observation comes to mind. This text which, one may be sure, had been carefully meditated, is not satisfactory. It has a suspect air, not only because it extends the field of action of the intended conference by referring insidiously to the Treaty of Versailles but, above all, because it makes a distinction between Germany on the one hand, and France and Great Britain on the other. Why was not the offer addressed to all three countries simultaneously? Why was the invitation only to be extended to Germany if France and

England accepted it? Immediately a suspicion arises. Was it not because Signor Mussolini knew that at dawn on the following day (September 1st) the German troops would penetrate into Poland, and would already have seized upon sureties there, the result being that Hitler would already be in part possession when the Berlin Government was *officially* informed of the acceptance or refusal of the Chancelleries of London and Paris?

Despite the precautions taken, indeed precisely because they were taken, so as to make French and British opinion believe that Mussolini was acting of his own volition, it is beyond the bounds of possibility that the Duce's initiative was decided upon without the consent of his ally. We can go further. Comparison of the events with the documents provides conclusive evidence that Mussolini only acted in accord with Hitler. At that point another question inevitably arises. Why did he conceal this agreement? Why did he pretend to have to seek it when he had it already? To set off his good offices to advantage? That would not be enough by itself to justify this attitude. Could it be that Mussolini only undertook his *démarche* at the request of some individual in Paris or London? Even accepting this hypothesis, which is not devoid of probability, but whose truth or falseness could only be attested by Count Ciano, M. Georges Bonnet, M. François Poncet or, at a pinch, by M. de Monzie and M. Baudouin, the Italian offer could not have been officially launched without previous telephonic contact between the eyrie of Berchtesgaden and the Palazzo di Venezia. Thus one is driven back to the logical deduction, the strength of which is all the greater because the proposal for the conference came so tardily. This proposal could only have had two issues and two results, both redounding to the glory of Hitler and Mussolini, and to the confusion of France and Britain.

Now for the two possibilities : (1) Either the suggestion for a conference would have been accepted by England

and France (as it is now plain that certain people wished) with no other condition than that Poland should be represented. In that case Germany would have taken part, and the discussions would have begun. Far from having to order his motorised divisions and air squadrons to withdraw to his own side of the Polish-German frontier, Hitler would have made use of their success to insist on the full consent of the Polish representative, and the resigned agreement of Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier to the "Proposal for settling the problem of Dantzic and the Corridor as well as the Polish-German question of minorities," that is, to the ultimatum which, during the night of August 31st-September 1st, he had made known to the world as the last word of his generosity towards the Polish people. This was, it must be remembered, a bare few hours before: "Without any declaration of war, the German army crossed the frontier, and the German air force began to bomb the Polish aerodromes and lines of communication."

There would have been no choice. Take it or leave it. Caught in the snare of a second Munich, hopelessly at sea, Colonel Beck, Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier would, perhaps, end by capitulating. That, at any rate, would be something gained. Then it would only remain to persuade Stalin to delay the partition agreed upon in the treaty of August 23rd. Alternatively, Poland could be allowed to shift for herself with Russia, while the Germans installed themselves in the territories made over to them. They could be relied upon to round them off nicely later, as they had done in Czecho-Slovakia. (2) The other possibility was that there would occur what actually did occur. France and England would not reject the notion of a conference out of hand. They would pay the Duce the compliment of agreeing in principle, even if their experts scented trickery and made conditions which Hitler was resolved to set aside. In that event the machinery of the offer would work in such a way that the breakdown



could be ascribed either to France or to England, to one or the other, and preferably to England, since that, as we are now entitled to assume, was the ulterior motive in the minds of the initiators of the scheme.

This is the unmistakable conclusion which results from the study of the documents, if one examines them in detail, bearing in mind our earlier observations. Let us refer to document No. 20 of the German White Book. The date mentioned in the title is, itself, revealing :

*"Communication handed to the German Foreign Office by the Italian Ambassador on the morning of September 2nd, 1939."*

What ! Was it only on the morning of September 2nd that the Italian Ambassador apprised Berlin of so important a diplomatic step, which, moreover, was taken on August 31st at 1.0 p.m. ? Here, already, is something decidedly odd.

Now, what is there in this notice, this veritable poem of diplomatic language ? Let us go through it line by line to savour at every stage the artistry of the composer.

*"For your information Italy communicates to you, naturally leaving every decision to the Führer . . ."*

Wait a minute ! *"for your information !"* No more than that ? After three days of telephone calls from Rome to Paris and London, there still had been none between Rome and Berlin, or, if there had, Herr von Ribbentrop had not been informed of the plot that was being hatched at the Chigi Palace ! Really, that is carrying dissimulation to the point of effrontery ! Let us read further : *" . . . naturally leaving every decision to the Führer . . ."*

The *"naturally"* was put in to emphasise that, Duce though he be, Mussolini is only in tow behind the Führer.

To continue :

*" . . . that she is still in a position to obtain the consent of France, England and Poland to a conference on the following bases :*

- (1) An armistice leaving the armies where they are now.
- (2) The calling of a conference within two or three days.
- (3) A solution of the Polish conflict which, as matters are to-day, would certainly be favourable to Germany."

(1) Hullo! Hullo! What is the word "armistice" doing here, seeing that there has been no previous mention of it?

Surely it is put in to avert in advance the stipulation bound to be made: "That the German troops should be withdrawn from the territory which they occupy."

(2) This item indicates willingness to allow Hitler's army to gain ground in Poland and render still "more favourable to Germany the state of affairs" so complacently referred to in item 3.

The "communication" ends with the neat little sentence: "*This idea which originated with the Duce is to-day particularly advocated by France.*"

There is a hint of contempt about this phrase, not surprising on the part of Count Ciano, and it might well lend support to the hypothesis we have diffidently advanced, namely that the manœuvre adroitly contrived by Signor Mussolini was perhaps backed, if not by a petition, at least by preliminary good wishes for the success of such a scheme, of French, but *unofficial* origin.

Let us still confine ourselves to German documents. The White Book, from which we have just borrowed the above delectable "communication," begins with a sort of résumé entitled: "The last phase of the German-Polish crisis." From this we must single out Paragraph XI, which seems to have been written in advance for the use of the Vichy accusers of England:

"In order to banish the menace of war, which had come dangerously close in consequence of these two notes, the Duce made a proposal for an armistice and a subsequent conference for the settlement of the German-Polish conflict. The German and the French Governments

replied in the affirmative to this proposal whilst the British Government refused to accept it. That this was so was already apparent in the speeches made by the British Prime Minister and the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the afternoon of September 2nd in the British Houses of Parliament, and a communication to that effect was made to the Reich minister for Foreign Affairs by the Italian Ambassador on the evening of September 2nd; thus also in the opinion of the Italian Government the initiative of the Duce had been wrecked by England."

This résumé, drawn up a long while after the occurrence, does not possess the unwitting frankness of the "communication," but it, too, provides interesting matter for reflection. Mussolini's suggestion is described in it as: "A proposal for an armistice and a subsequent conference." What are we to make of this? The word "armistice" presupposes the beginning of a war and was, as we have seen, inserted in the "communication" referring to the visit of the Italian Ambassador to Herr von Ribbentrop on September 2nd. But you will seek it in vain in the original formula handed by Count Ciano to M. François Poncet and Sir Percy Loraine on August 31st. Therefore Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax in London, and M. Daladier and M. Bonnet in Paris had discussed and were still discussing, together with their respective experts, a document *in which there was no reference to military events.*

It is quite true that the French reply, for the drawing up of which a Council of Ministers was summoned in Paris on the morning of September 1st, did not take into account the German invasion of Poland which had just begun while the Government was deliberating. This reply was "affirmative," naturally! Yes, certainly! It was *affirmative* in principle, but conditional, since it required that Poland should take part in the conference: it did not yet stipulate that the invading troops should withdraw. But, that very evening, the French Ambassador,

conjointly with the British, delivered to the Wilhelmstrasse an energetic note of protest against the German aggression, which had now become obvious, and they both warned Herr von Ribbentrop that the obligations of their countries towards Poland would come into the fullest effect if the Government of the Reich "did not suspend all aggressive action and declare itself ready to withdraw its forces immediately from Polish territory."

The "affirmative" nature of the French reply had therefore nothing in common with that of the German, since "affirmative" for Ribbentrop meant keeping what had been seized, while awaiting the opportunity to seize more. When it is asserted now that England caused the idea of a conference to break down because she insisted, as a necessary preliminary to negotiation, that the invading troops should return to the frontier, whereas France would not have insisted on it, the world's common sense is being flagrantly flouted, and truth subjected to the most fantastic liberties.

How could France at one and the same time summon the Nazi Government to withdraw the invading troops from Poland to Germany, and yet attend a conference without this summons having been acted upon? There is no reconciling the two. It is the merest foolery.

Besides, to settle the question once and for all, we have only to appeal to the Presiding Magistrate, in other words, to Count Ciano, who at a quarter-past two on September 2nd sent the following message to M. Georges Bonnet by telephone:

*"Signor Attolico has just informed me of the reply of Herr von Ribbentrop.*

*"Herr Hitler has duly noted the message. He is not opposed to considering the project, but he is in receipt of two notes, one French, the other English, which were handed to him yesterday evening. If these notes have the character of an ultimatum, his answer to the Governments of London and Paris is a categorical 'No,' and he would not, in*

*consequence, be prepared to consider any suggestion for a conference."*

Both M. Bonnet and Lord Halifax replied that their notes had nothing of an ultimatum about them. But it is obvious that this question of whether the Franco-British protest constituted an ultimatum or not was only put forward in the way that a pawn is advanced to parry or skirmish. It was the substance of the notes that irked Hitler and Ribbentrop. It faced them with the alternatives of withdrawing the troops in order to attend the conference, or of not withdrawing them, which would amount to a rejection of the conference on their side. So they played a cautious game, hand in glove with Mussolini, to attain the dual result of continuing the invasion and to make the British Government responsible for the breaking off of the Rome negotiations.

The British Government did not resort to such trickery.

Mr. Chamberlain was certainly, as he was careful to emphasise in the House of Commons during the decisive day of September 2nd, "the last man to neglect any opportunity which offered a serious chance of avoiding the great catastrophe of war even at the last moment." But he was obliged to admit his lack of confidence in a proposal which, to have any prospect of success, should have been made at least some days before the entry of the Germans into Poland.

"I confess that in the present case I should have to be convinced of the good faith of the other side in any action which they took before I could regard the proposition which has been made as one to which we could expect a reasonable chance of a successful issue."

And the conditions which would convince him of good faith? He set them forth with perfect clarity in the following terms:

"While appreciating the efforts of the Italian Government, His Majesty's Government, for their part, would find it impossible to take part in a conference while Poland

is being subjected to invasion, her towns are under bombardment and Dantzic is being made the subject of a unilateral settlement by force. His Majesty's Government will, as stated yesterday, be bound to take action unless the German forces are withdrawn from Polish territory. They are in communication with the French Government as to the limit of time within which it would be necessary for the British and French Governments to know whether the German Government were prepared to effect such a withdrawal."

Mr. Chamberlain then added with energy :

"If the German Government should agree to withdraw their forces, then His Majesty's Government would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier."

Could a more conciliatory spirit have been brought to the examination of Signor Mussolini's proposal? Hitler assuredly brought much less, since the suggestion of his Axis partner, as Sir Archibald Sinclair very justly pointed out at this same sitting of the House, had : "At any rate caused no delay in the advance of the German army."

Likewise it was scarcely possible to be more frank. The joint Anglo-French note was not an ultimatum, but it did demand a speedy reply. During the course of September 2nd, as Mr. Chamberlain announced in the Commons, the two Governments were in communication on the subject of the limit of time to be allowed to the German Government, beyond which silence would be considered as a refusal.

At no time was there a shadow of *official* French reticence about the necessity of this time limit. If such did exist it was only in secret thoughts, for in no document or conversation was it expressed. The only divergence of opinions was over the exact date of the time limit.

Mr. Chamberlain, strong in the knowledge of the tendency developing in the Commons and in the public mind, and convinced that Germany had definitely chosen the solution of war, indicated in a telephone conversation

with M. Daladier, which took place at half-past nine in the evening of September 2nd, that the time limit should expire at midnight. The French Government were in favour of a longer delay. The British Prime Minister then suggested that their respective ambassadors should present the ultimatum at 8.0 a.m. on September 3rd, making it plain as they did so that, if the German Government had not given a favourable answer by noon, Great Britain and France would consider themselves at war with Germany. On the essential point M. Daladier could put forward no objection since he stated that Count Ciano had just been informed that it was impossible for France to consider the question of a conference before the German troops had evacuated the Polish territory invaded as early as the previous day. But a point of form was involved. In the course of a conversation between Paris and Rome, Count Ciano had allowed it to be understood that, in his opinion, a slight prospect of a German acceptance existed, provided that the Anglo-French step was delayed until midday on September 3rd. For its part, the French Government had agreed to wait.

An hour later, during a second telephone conversation, but this time with M. Georges Bonnet, Lord Halifax announced that the British Government could not delay the fulfilment of its pledges to Poland if Germany did not give as soon as possible the assurances for which she had been formally asked. He therefore proposed that the British and French Ambassadors in Berlin should go the next morning (September 3rd) at eight o'clock to Herr von Ribbentrop and demand a reply by noon, but he acknowledged that for various reasons the French Government might act separately. M. Georges Bonnet invoked military reasons why M. Coulondre's step should not be taken until noon instead of at 8.0 a.m.

Accordingly at eight o'clock next morning Sir Neville Henderson went to Herr von Ribbentrop and discharged his mission, asking for a reply by eleven o'clock at the

latest. Mr. Chamberlain made an announcement to this effect at an early sitting of the Commons. Not until 12.30 p.m. did M. Coulondre go to the Foreign Secretary of the Reich, fixing the time limit for five o'clock in the afternoon.

At no time had there been disagreement between Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier or M. Bonnet over the evacuation, prior to any conference, of the invaded Polish territories. The only argument was over the time limit to be allowed to Herr von Ribbentrop. In London there was haste to satisfy the Commons and public opinion, alike indignant over the invasion of Poland. In Paris there was temporising for a few hours, justified *officially* by military arguments and by military arguments alone.

The position taken up, in the name of Great Britain, by Mr. Chamberlain in the Commons, and likewise by the Foreign Secretary in the Lords, was therefore also that of France, for we cannot regard as garbled the account of the telephone conversation exchanged at 9.0 p.m. on this same September 2nd between M. Georges Bonnet and Count Ciano, given by M. Bonnet himself and inserted as the final point in the French Yellow Book :

*"The Minister assured Count Ciano that the note of September 1st was not in the nature of an ultimatum and that the French Government was ready to wait until midday on Sunday, September 3rd, for the German reply. At the same time the French Government shared the view of the British Government that the conference could not open under the shadow of force and that, if the proposal was to reach a successful outcome it behoved the German armies to evacuate the territory they had occupied in Poland. Count Ciano informed the Minister, who had already received a similar intimation from Lord Halifax, that the British Government laid down as an essential preliminary condition the evacuation of the occupied territories. Count Ciano thought that this condition would not be accepted by the Government of the Reich. The Minister concluded by thanking Count Ciano for the efforts he had made for the maintenance of peace."*



This confirms purely and simply all that I have just set forth with a minuteness which seemed to me necessary.

After this long explanation of the documents bearing upon Signor Mussolini's proposal of a conference, I think I am justified in giving a negative answer to the question which I put at the beginning of this chapter !

No ! There is no getting away from it. Even if Mussolini's suggestion had not been a trap, it would not have stopped the war because Hitler and Ribbentrop did not want to stop it. There are certain facts which override everything else. Who fired the first shot ? Who invaded Poland ? Did the invader know that, by doing so, he was attacking France and Great Britain ? Had he been told so—and told so again ? Had he not been implored, not once, but ten times, at least to reflect ? Had he not been offered the choice of all the lifebuoys which could have saved peace ? All these questions lead to one single incontrovertible fact. Hitler alone—and by Hitler I mean at the same time himself, his henchmen, his allies and the majority of the nation which follows him and sees itself in him—Hitler is responsible for the war.

If there are men who assert that it could, nevertheless, have been avoided or at least deferred, notwithstanding the wish cherished by Hitler himself to wage it *when he was fifty rather than at fifty-five or sixty*, they must lay it down as a principle that, whatever the exactions he might demand, they were resolved, and always would be resolved, to bow to them and to him. Short of that, there was no other means of preventing war. Short of absolute, unconditional submission, a halter round the neck—and even then, yes, I repeat, even then !—For at the pitch of arrogant and victorious aberration which the Master of the Reich had reached and which his incredible successes, due to an equally incredible weakness on the part of his victims, had only served to increase, would he not have made war in any case, even on his slaves ? For pleasure, from sadism, from sheer intoxication, and even for nothing.

## Chapter V

### The Two Georges Bonnets

HOW MUCH IS M. GEORGES BONNET'S ACCUSATION WORTH?—IT IS IN DISAGREEMENT WITH HIS YELLOW BOOK—BLANC BONNET AND BONNET BLANC ARE TWO—CHAUTEMPS AND BONNET AT A LUNCH—BONNET AND HERR VON RIBBENTROP EXCHANGE DENIALS—M. JULES LUKASIEVICZ' OPINION OF M. BONNET—M. BONNET'S ILLUSIONS ABOUT GERMANY—BONNET THE "BEAR."

IF, as I am convinced, I have demolished the accusation which, to free Germany from responsibility for the war, bases itself on the plan for a second Munich proposed by Signor Mussolini on August 31st, 1939, then the authority of the men who uphold it—assuming that they have any left—is strangely weakened.

I am not referring to Herr von Ribbentrop, the originator of the accusation. He is merely faithful to his rôle. Since he has to absolve himself from guilt, it is only to be expected that, in his customary fashion, he should confuse dates, documents and testimonies with the object of deceiving German as much as neutral opinion and of bewildering the opponents. But to the execution of this laudable task he brings less skill than evil intention. There is always some crack which causes his elaborate fabric to collapse.

Whom has he found at Vichy to help him in this business? Who is helping him? The man who was Foreign Secretary of the Pétain Government, M. Baudouin? Possibly. With what purpose? To plunge a dart into

## 56 Truth on the Tragedy of France

the flesh of the British Lion and make it start under the smart of the insult? To deceive a section of the French people and win them over to his own hatred of Great Britain? To raise Mussolini in the public estimation, Mussolini, whom he admires, on whom he vainly counted to obtain less shameful armistice terms, and on whom he still bases his future and that of France, since he was gambling on a peace dictated by Hitler and the Duce? Is that the reason? Perhaps, perhaps. But my own theory is almost entirely of a psychological kind and has, so far, no indisputable action to support it.

On the other hand, there is a man who bids fair to become Chief Prosecutor, advocate-general in the anti-British accusations and who, we are told, will rise to confront his former Cabinet leader, the ex-Premier, M. Daladier.

*"If I had been listened to," he will say, "if the English had followed me, the conference would have taken place, peace would have been preserved, France would be intact and now revelling in the delights of prosperity!"*

Yes. We are talking of M. Georges Bonnet.

The position adopted by M. Georges Bonnet is, at first sight, enough to baffle anyone, for are we not still under the influence of the telephone conversation of 9 p.m. on September 2nd? Then, as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Daladier Cabinet, he informed Count Ciano that:

"The French Government, like the British, is of opinion that the conference cannot open under the shadow of force and that, if the idea is to have a successful outcome, it behoves the German armies to evacuate the territory they have occupied in Poland."

Perhaps it will be said that, in his official capacity, he was passing on a decision of the majority of the Government, but was personally opposed to it? Very well. But then, at the Cabinet Meeting he would have thrown his ministerial portfolio into the balance to weigh against the decision of his colleagues. He would have said to

them : " Either we go to this conference unconditionally, or I resign ! "

Did he do so ? Certainly not ! If he had, it would not have been he who telephoned to Count Ciano. Or if, out of courtesy towards the Italian minister, he had thought fit to communicate to him the decision of the Government in person, he would have resigned a few minutes later. But he did not do that either. He is therefore very ill qualified to accuse M. Daladier, his colleagues and England. Each of them might very well reply : "*I listened to the voice of my conscience and obeyed it,*" and go on to object : "*But you, who now invoke the scruples of your own, at the critical moment, when there was no room for hesitation, neither listened to it nor obeyed it.*"

If he accuses others, he accuses himself more—and the accusation is crushing.

No, no ! I cannot believe that the man who seeks to saddle England and M. Daladier with the blame for the war is the same who, on July 21st, 1939, ended his reply to an insolent letter of Herr von Ribbentrop with this declaration :

*" I will not allow it to be said that our country would be responsible for war because it had honoured its signature."*

Nor can this accuser be the man who, on June 29th of the same year, had written to M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London, in the following terms :

*" It would seem to me very desirable that Lord Halifax, in the speech which he is to make this evening, should find occasion to give the leaders of the Reich a clear warning of the common determination of the two Governments to fulfil their obligations of assistance to Poland, whatever oblique means Germany might contrive to create confusion about the real character of her action. If you could express views along these lines to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in good time for his speech, I should attach real importance to your intervention."*

M. Georges Bonnet, in point of fact, left the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs on September 13th, 1939, to become Minister of Justice. Would he, I wonder, now claim or allow it to be understood that he did so on his own initiative? I think not. There would be too many witnesses to the contrary. I even go so far as to affirm that he never gave up the hope of returning to his former office, and that when M. Daladier, who since September 13th, 1939, had concentrated in his own hands both the Ministries of National Defence and of Foreign Affairs, talked of giving up the Quai d'Orsay, then M. Georges Bonnet at once set out to recover it, or at least to see that matters remained as they stood. Anything was preferable to the installation of a new occupant who might dig himself in and delay his return!

It was during this period, while he was kicking his heels in the Place Vendôme, that he had to collaborate with the staff of the Foreign Ministry in selecting and arranging the documents of the Yellow Book, which constitutes the most pertinent proof of the guilt of Hitler and Ribbentrop. While collating the text, and ruling out here and there a telegram which tended to show him as having endorsed the theses of Ribbentrop, he put his signature at the foot of this invaluable document in which his name appears on nearly every page.

"But," I have been told, "you do not know the files of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. They are crowded with documents which cover him in any contingency."

What does all this mean? What are we to make of these two faces? Ought the old saying "*C'est Bonnet blanc et blanc Bonnet*" to be altered to "*C'est blanc Bonnet et Bonnet blanc*," the one being entirely the opposite of the other? Can there be two Georges Bonnets—a pro-British and an anti-British Bonnet, a Bonnet who is your friend and a Bonnet who is not, a Bonnet who says white and a Bonnet who says black, a Bonnet who gives his word of honour and a Bonnet who forgets he has given it, a Bonnet

of impeccable firmness in diplomacy and a defeatist Bonnet, a Bonnet who has courage and a Bonnet who trembles in the face of certain responsibilities, a Bonnet supremely adept at manœuvre and a Bonnet who bogs himself in foolish intrigues—finally, for all things have an end—a Bonnet who climbs rapidly to the summit and a Bonnet who misses the bus . . . ?

I made the acquaintance of the first Bonnet during his association with that great Frenchman, Paul Painlevé, with whom I was united by a close bond of affection, and whose collaborator Bonnet was at the beginning of his political career. I became his friend, and gave him proof of it more than once. I think he was mine, too. But—true enough!—there were two Georges Bonnets, and I withdrew myself from the path of the second when he entered upon a policy of friendship with Germany, which was far from being mine. Indeed, I thought it fatal and, even if I had been wrong and he right, it would still have been unworthy, since he dared not pursue it openly, denying it discreetly when it threatened to become too obvious, and pursuing it secretly when he was compelled ostensibly to follow another course.

How far did influences, some of which I can only surmise, exert their sway over him to the extent of disturbing a balance that an intelligence exceptionally clear, subtle and calculating ought to have maintained unswervingly? To what degree did his ambition lead his judgment astray? He had reached the stage of considering himself balked of a right when he was out of the Government and insufficiently appreciated because he did not reach the topmost rung of the ladder: this has consistently made him a malcontent with the ways of a conspirator. He knew his qualities, he was fully aware of his gifts, but he did not realise that he often compromised their effects by a too obvious lack of patience: moreover, he had no idea of his limitations. Exceptionally energetic, he certainly never minded how much trouble he took. Up at dawn, when it

was a matter of conducting affairs, he pursued his task until far into the night, to resume it again the next morning. He shrank from no step, he considered every possible course with the zeal of a model, an ideal functionary, whose like could not readily be found.

He was formidable in opposition, for from morning to night, in the lobbies of the Chamber and the Senate, at lunch and dinner, by telephone and visit, he sawed away ceaselessly at the chairs of those who affronted him by being Ministers when he was not. And he made use, for the most part, of excellent tools, by which I mean excellent arguments, to such good purpose that little time was lost in offering him compensation.

When M. Léon Blum sent M. Georges Bonnet to Washington as Ambassador, an ingenuous political friend of the Socialist leader reproached him for making the appointment. M. Blum who, at that time felt a certain liking and esteem for Georges Bonnet, sought an excuse, and said in reply to the disgruntled "comrade": "He was getting too dangerous in the lobbies, so I sent him a long way off."

One day a President of the Council was considering a reshuffle of his Cabinet. "You are not going to keep Bonnet, are you?" he was asked.

"You get hold of some rum ideas!" replied the Statesman. "He would be more dangerous out than in!"

When M. Paul Reynaud formed his Ministry in March he dropped Bonnet, who was the more outraged at his exclusion because some weeks before, as Minister of Justice, he had presented to the Cabinet and pushed through, for the special benefit of M. Reynaud, but to the great indignation of their austere colleagues, a decree quickening the process of "separation of bed and board" in divorce.

"Georges," as he was called within the precincts of the Palais Bourbon, protested so long and loud, and manœuvred with such verve and cunning that M. Reynaud was only saved from a disaster by one vote. So the next day an

Ambassadorship was sought for "Georges," and "Georges," having had an inkling of it, amused himself by remarking wherever he went: "It's odd! How keen they are for me to go away!"

Dangerous in opposition, he was, in office, an admirable minister—until, with good success and results to his credit, he devoted his prodigious shrewdness to the task of hastening the fall of his Cabinet leader. How many times did I say to him—and to others, too, for that matter: "Be patient and prudent. Your turn will come all the quicker for your not having looked as though you wanted to bring it nearer."

But he would listen to nothing and nobody. His strongest card was resignation—which, incidentally, he was sometimes justified in playing. "Dear old Georges," I heard Camille Chautemps say once. "He's been to offer me his resignation again."

I should find it difficult to forget a lunch at which Georges Bonnet and Camille Chautemps vied with one another to succeed a Premier whose Ministry had just fallen.

"It's my turn!" "No, Georges, it's mine?" "The financial question comes before everything; the Minister of Finance ought to be President of the Council." "No, Georges, you're not the one the President of the Republic will call on to form a new ministry. He will choose me. I'd be willing to leave you at the Ministry of Finance, and you shall have all the financial powers you want."

Ultimately, if I remember right, the choice of the President of the Republic fell on a third robber.

It was in this way that M. Georges Bonnet often impaired unquestioned gifts of industry, perseverance, acuteness and skill by boundless ambition and an almost morbid taste for useless wiles.

Have you ever studied a picture of him? The sharp-cut features are instinct with intelligence: but it is the intelligence of a fox on the alert, an impression strengthened



by a second glance. The blue eyes seem to be veiled, bathed in mist, as though he wanted to conceal thoughts he dared not show, even when he had nothing at all to hide. His manner of speech, too, is against him in the same kind of way. He has never been an orator and never will be. But he might well make his mark as a debater on the British model, for he generally knows what he is talking about, being, as one might expect from a product of that great school, the Council of State, a tireless sifter of documents. But, as it is, if he does not read his speech, and even at times when he does, his tongue hesitates, he gropes, falters and mumbles. If he walks he does not go straight, but moves sideways as though he had to squeeze between two doors, in such a manner that all one sees of him is a long, powerful nose that seems to scent every danger and every prey.

Several times M. Georges Bonnet has apparently been well on the road towards a great career. Each time a mere nothing, a trifle which has given rise to mistrust in one person or another, has sent him spinning down the ladder when he had almost reached the top.

I call to mind, though without going into it, one business in which, but for some friends, myself among them, he would have gone under, simply because he had denied some insignificant facts of which there was no need to be ashamed.

On many occasions he took courageous decisions. Having returned from Washington to save the imperilled finances of France, he persistently advocated to his Cabinet leader an internal policy which consisted in restoring the impaired social and economic policies. But at the decisive moment, under the spell of some evil fairy or other, his campaign assumed the aspect of a plot. He denied the charge, only to be accused of lying, and was obliged to withdraw into his shell.

A chance, which he certainly fostered, took him to the Quai d'Orsay. He had the makings of a good, perhaps

a great, Foreign Minister. It was his misfortune that his leaning towards underhand dealings found encouragement in diplomacy. Did he really believe, as has been asserted, that diplomacy is the art of disguising one's thoughts? The fact remains that in different sets of circumstances he gave the impression of saying and unsaying, giving his word and withdrawing it, promising and not fulfilling.

When Herr von Weizsacker, Secretary of State at the Wilhelmstrasse, wished to reject the French protest against the rape of Czecho-Slovakia, he invoked "verbal assurances," supposedly given by M. Georges Bonnet to Herr von Ribbentrop in Paris at the time of the signing of the Franco-German declaration. According to these "Czecho-Slovakia would not in future form the object of any exchange of views."

I should like to be certain that M. Bonnet was right in denying these "assurances." But it is a pity that by a mere gesture or perhaps a silence he should have allowed Herr von Ribbentrop to receive so mistaken an impression.

When he declared, in a note handed to Count von Welczeck, the German Ambassador, that, notwithstanding his own cordial relations with Herr von Ribbentrop, he had made it abundantly clear to the same Herr von Ribbentrop in the previous December that any enterprise, of whatever nature, which tended to modify the *status quo* at Dantzig, would provoke armed resistance from Poland, call into play the Franco-Polish agreement, and oblige France to come immediately to the assistance of Poland, I have no desire to put this solemn declaration in the balance against the denial, by no means disinterested, of the German Minister. At the same time I regret that M. Georges Bonnet should so often be placed, thanks to his nature and the vagueness of his words, under the necessity of explaining and contradicting himself.

In a White Book, broadcast from Berlin by the D.N.B., the German Government published (at the end of March, 1940) sixteen diplomatic documents alleged to have been

found in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw. One of them is the report dated December 17th, 1938, and sent by M. Jules Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris to Colonel Beck, the Foreign Secretary of Poland. In it the Ambassador describes conversations he has had with M. Georges Bonnet on the morrow of Ribbentrop's visit to France, and of the signing of the Franco-German declaration of the preceding December 6th. In this report M. Lukasiewicz complains: "That France, in the event of finding herself compelled to honour the terms of the Franco-Polish alliance, would make far greater efforts to get out of her obligations than to fulfil them." He acknowledges that his "point of view does not correspond with the declaration of M. Georges Bonnet." But he adds: "*M. Bonnet is a weak man, who, generally speaking, is not prepared to carry out a thing faithfully and is inclined to adapt himself, his attitude varying successively with each different interlocutor. Although I do not mean to question the sincerity of his declarations as regards ourselves, I am absolutely certain that, faced by the Government, the Press or the Parliament, he would not adopt, at least as far as the alliance is concerned, the same attitude as he took up in conversation.*"

M. Lukasiewicz then devotes himself to a close criticism of French policy, which he describes as: "Playing since Munich the role of a beaten man, too weak to break its prior international engagements, and likewise too weak to execute them with sufficient energy": as "remaining paralysed and resigned, assuming a defeatist attitude towards all that is going on in Central and Eastern Europe, considering the Polish alliance and the pact with the Soviet Union a burden. French policy, in short, is stamped with complete passivity and defeatism."

Then he gives his Minister the following information: "*Herr von Ribbentrop has been assured that France would not oppose German economic expansion in the Danube basin. Furthermore, Herr von Ribbentrop, returning from France,*

*could not take away the impression that he would meet, on her part, with any sort of energetic action in the event of a political expansion of Germany in this direction."*

I know that sometimes one must not attach too much importance to reports like this. I know that M. Lukasiewicz, who belonged to the set of Colonel Beck and was his personal friend, would be likely to reveal a tendency to flatter the anti-French opinions of his Minister.

For all that, one must admit that there is a basis of probability—even though a slight one—in the pessimism which the Polish diplomat showed towards French policy ; and he was imbued with this pessimism by what he could hear in some of the fashionable aristocratic and political *salons* in which he moved. We shall have occasion to return to this when we expose the campaign of defeatism which has had such cruel repercussions.

I cannot but be sensible, also, of the conformity of M. de Lukasiewicz's words with those of Herr von Weizsacker and Herr von Ribbentrop touching the probable, nay, assured indifference of France towards Central and Eastern Europe. If it does not constitute a guarantee of authenticity for the evidence of von Ribbentrop, who is, of course, accustomed to misrepresent to his own advantage or to arrive at improper conclusions by the wilful misapplication of words, declarations and pledges, it is none the less an unfortunate coincidence, the cause of which can be traced to the Ambassador's reproach that M. Georges Bonnet is "inclined to adapt himself, his attitude varying successively with each different interlocutor."

This tendency may have its advantages. But it carries with it so many drawbacks that it demands a matchless self-control. I fear that M. Bonnet has not had enough of it, and that without sufficient discrimination he has too often adapted himself to interlocutors more cunning than himself.

He has been the victim of his character, of his ambition, of excessive self-confidence, of flatterers and of a mirage. When, under ill-omened influences, he drew the lottery

ticket of Franco-German understanding, he and I had a long conversation, the last which was completely friendly and without mental reservations.

He exposed his views with enthusiasm. He was going to bring about something that it had never been possible to accomplish before: Franco-German reconciliation would be achieved. War would no longer be in prospect. We should have peace for a long time at least.

Perhaps my expression betrayed some alarm. He looked annoyed, and made as though to take from a drawer the first draft of the future declaration.

"I do not dispute your intentions," I broke in. "But I implore you not to be taken in. Do not allow yourself to be swirled away into a current from which you would not be able to get clear. There is nothing to be done with Hitlerism, nothing to be arranged: possibly not even with Germany, certainly not with the present Reich. You know I was Briand's friend, and his defender until the last moment of his life. Where a man such as he failed with the Germany of Stresemann, how can you fool yourself into imagining that you or anyone else can succeed with a Germany made fanatical by Hitler? In any case I couldn't go with you along that road."

He then made me certain confidential disclosures, which I have not the right to reproduce, about the state of military unpreparedness, the inadequacy of the Air Force, the Communist danger, and the deplorable social and economic plight of France.

"I agree," was my reply. "And I'll grant you this. If you're only taking out an insurance policy, all right. If you're doing it to gain time, so that the country can bestir itself and get ready socially, militarily and financially to withstand the assault which no scrap of paper will prevent—well and good! But let that be the only reason. Otherwise there'll be a rude awakening."

As at this time the Italian campaign of claims against France was gathering strength, I added: "If you make

use of it as a bait for Mussolini——” He winked assent, and I went on : “ But even so I haven’t much faith in it, in fact I’ve precious little faith left. Still, it might work.”

Politicians are like rivers : they follow their currents. One has to be a powerful oarsman to struggle against the stream when it runs too fast. I believe that Georges Bonnet was borne down by Ribbentrop. He was the victim of a mirage. He never got away from its influence and that spoiled everything he undertook thereafter. That is why it was possible for him to give the impression conveyed in the report of M. Lukasevich. That is why he turned this way and that, at random, during the Polish crisis. That is the reason he aroused misgivings in London about his sincerity. These misgivings annoyed him, when he heard of them, and the bitterness he felt as a result perhaps subconsciously inspired his present attitude. That, too, is why, generally speaking, he played a losing hand, whereas possibly the only trump which would have won the time necessary for French recovery was to allow the man of Berchtesgaden and his agents to detect no sign of weariness, passivity and fear.

In life, and more especially in political life, there are, as on the Stock Exchange, men who are “ bulls ” and others who are “ bears.” For more than a year Georges Bonnet had been a “ bear.” On that fatal day, September 3rd, I went to see him rather in his official capacity than as a former friend.

He said to me gloomily : “ Well, now you can see if a policy of firmness has prevented war ! ”

“ No one said,” I answered, “ at all events, I never said that a firm policy would prevent war. What I did say was that, if war could be prevented, it was only by a firm policy. That’s not the same thing ! ”

I might have added, but I didn’t—for his face bore the marks of several nights of sleeplessness and work :

“ One thing is certain. It is a policy of weakness which has brought us to it ! ”

## Chapter VI

### Edouard Daladier and the Declaration of War

AT THE FRENCH CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES ON  
SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1939—DIVISIONS IN THE PARTIES  
—THE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES OF M. DALADIER—  
LACK OF MEN—DECADENCE OF THE POLITICAL  
RÉGIME—THE TURMOIL OF 1936—THE CHARACTER  
AND POPULARITY OF M. DALADIER

THE die was cast. "*All the pacific forces of the world, moral and material alike, banded themselves together in order to save the peace of the world,*" but in vain.

Hitler made his choice. On September 1st, the frontier of Poland was crossed by the German advance guards. Facing the hideous adventure, having either to turn it aside or to let it loose, Hitler elected to let it loose.

On September 1st, the French Government ordered general mobilisation. On the 2nd, the Chamber and the Senate associated their responsibility with that of the Government by a massive vote of military credits. M. Daladier, with as much clearness as restraint, described the sequence of facts. He allowed a wisp of hope to hover, which was soon to be dissipated. He showed that France, driven to the point where she must fulfil her obligations, could not evade them without becoming: "*A France despised, a France isolated, a France discredited, without allies and without support,*" left later to stand up, herself, to an "appalling assault."

For the benefit of those whom, from his position in the

rostrum, he could see hostile, unyielding, but silent and scattered among the different bays of the House, he let fall a sentence which, in the manner of a sinister prophecy has assumed after the Bordeaux capitulation a tragic significance : "*At the cost of our honour we should purchase only a precarious, revocable peace and, to-morrow, when we had to fight, having lost the esteem of our allies and of the other nations, we should be nothing but an abject people, doomed to defeat and servitude.*"

The Chamber, *almost* unanimously acclaimed M. Daladier. But it did not present the spectacle of sacred brotherhood afforded by the sitting of August, 1914, when one saw men of such widely divergent views as de Mun, Denys-Cochin, Maurice Barrès, Jules Guesde, Vaillant and Sembat join in one united impulse of patriotic ardour.

On the extreme Left there was a group which ordinarily ranged itself as one man on one side or another, but on this September day it dislocated itself in varied attitudes of constraint. The Communists did not yet know whether they were Communists first or Frenchmen first. Elsewhere, in this seat or that, an observant eye could note here a faint-hearted pallor, there a gesture of modified approval, yonder, hands which applauded perfunctorily to establish an alibi, or a shake of the head. . . .

But, above all, there were too many people who did not sacrifice on the altar of their country their rivalries, great or small, and their partisan quarrels. There were statesmen who took up an attitude of reserve. The adversaries of M. Georges Bonnet, growing ever more numerous, denounced his policy as equivocal and called for his departure from the Quai d'Orsay. His friends whispered mysterious criticisms of M. Daladier and of the English, to which the Mussolinian regrets of M. de Monzie's and M. Piétri's sets provided an echo. The latter who, throughout the war, was to suffer from a liver chronically disordered by unsatisfied ambition, found himself face to face with M. Campinchi, the Minister of Marine. Although



they cherished for one another a truly Corsican hatred, they began a rapid conversation.

"I suppose," inquired M. Piétri, "that war will not begin without there having been a formal vote of Parliament?"

"Didn't you notice that you had just voted it?" the Minister answered.

"How do you make that out?"

"Aren't the sixty-five milliard francs of credit a sufficient sign of approval? Perhaps you'd like to give us more!"

On the left, the Socialist party split up into two more and more sharply divided groups, that of M. Paul Faure opposed to war under any circumstances, and that of M. Blum standing for resistance to conquering Nazidom: both, however, were at one in wishing to attack M. Daladier.

The two groups desired that their party, profiting by the great Opportunity, should be represented in a new Government, but one, through the voice of M. Blum, advocated a solidly constituted Cabinet of bold men resolved on prosecuting the war with a maximum of fighting energy, whereas the other pictured itself, once it was an integral part of the executive, hastening on a peace of compromise. What! So soon? Yes, in thought, if not yet in public utterance.

The same dualism, though the rift went less deep, was to be found in the other parties. On the Right, the Lorrainer Marin was a patriot *perinde ac cadaver* according to the formula of the illustrious Company. But around him were hearts becoming faint and spirits becoming perverted by Hitlerian and Fascist propaganda. The Franco-German Committee, in which the agents of Herr von Ribbentrop called the tune, had made ravages in extreme Right circles, in many aristocratic and *bourgeois* salons. There it was the thing to underestimate the Nazi danger, and give pride of place in the precautions to be taken to the Bolshevik menace. At the same time the

## Edouard Daladier and Declaration of War 71

theme of peace, independent of all anti-Hitler and anti-Fascist considerations, of peace for peace's sake, was developed to the uttermost by eloquent orators at Syndicalist meetings.

In the Centre, M. Pierre Etienne Flandin, who was sufficiently eminent to rank among statesmen, had committed the blunder the year before of sending a telegram of personal congratulations to Mr. Chamberlain, Mussolini and Hitler after Munich.

Some telegraphist, an adherent of the Socialist or Communist party, had communicated the substance of it to the adversaries of M. Pierre Etienne Flandin. They knew how to make use of it, and M. Flandin was seriously handicapped thereby. Out of excessive prudence and owing to the natural trend of his mind he kept silent. He would have carved out a great success for himself if he had made some such statement as this: "Gentlemen, I do not, nor for that matter would you suffer me to, repudiate the policy of withdrawal upon ourselves which I advocated. It is no longer a matter for debate. France is at war, and it is not her own doing that she is. My co-operation is assured in full to those who wage it, provided that they wage it a hundred per cent."

But something, neither the inspiration nor the force of which I can contrive to understand, held him back. If he had done it, how much easier would M. Daladier's task have been! And how many things would, perhaps, have been changed!

In the evening following this weighty Parliamentary sitting, whilst trains started off, carrying towards the Maginot Line or to billets elsewhere, grave-faced, newly mobilised men, who pondered over the Event which had torn them away from their daily work: whilst along the roads there stretched out that exodus from Paris, which catastrophes provoke and which, moreover, had been wisely recommended by the authorities: whilst the battle of the iron pot and the earthenware pot grew ever more

intense in Poland, and the legendary Polish cavalry clashed with the armoured divisions of Germany, M. Daladier, head of the French Government, considering in private all the duties which had come to burden his composure, weighed the difficulties of the political problem.

Under the pressure of the parties they would become impossibilities if he did not solve them within a short while. Could he, for if he could, he must, construct a Ministry which, composed of men of action, would arouse all the energies of the country and bend them fiercely to one object: "To make war, to carry it on against each and every adversary, in order to win it—one day."

I bear witness that that is what he wanted to do. But he could not. Why not? Let no one say to me that Reynaud managed to do it. No. Reynaud did not form a Government of war. We shall have later to show clearly that he did not do it, though he wanted to, and that what he did do was to form a Cabinet of defeat.

The ill luck of France was much more serious. In the first place the men were no longer there, men of the stature of Poincaré, Briand, Clemenceau, Painlevé, even of Viviani and Barthou, who had both experience and authority, breeding as well as blood!

Apart from Daladier who was at the helm, Flandin had barred the road for himself, and was not doing what would have been necessary to open it again: Reynaud, who was a hope, was to become the most grievous of disappointments, whilst Léon Blum had still too many things for which to win forgiveness. Thanks to political stupidity there could be, perforce, no recourse to Mandel until the worst happenings had occurred . . . And the man who, on an impulse of justified pride, had said to me when he abandoned political life in 1936: "*On the day war is declared they will come to seek me*"—this man was lying on a nursing-home bed, paralysed, unconscious of the tragedy which was breaking out. If he has recovered sufficiently to realise it, how terrible—poor Tardieu!

must his moral suffering be, worse even than his physical pain !

How many times have I said to different people, and yet more often to myself : " Ah ! What a misfortune that Tardieu is dead ! "

This I said, not being willing to admit that, yet alive, he should not be at the post of command and public weal, in which the prayer of his patriotic pride might be fulfilled !

More even than her dearth of men, France was paying for all the errors of a régime which had been betrayed by demagoguery—both of Right and Left—by the passions of all the parties, and by the criminal hold of a destructive Communism on the State.

French democracy was called upon to grapple with the worst of fates : yet she was barely recovering from a malignant fever to which she had all but succumbed. This is not the place to record the history of the revolutionary turmoil which followed the election in May, 1936, of a Chamber of Deputies, born of the coalition of Communists, Socialists and Radical-Socialists. It paralysed the Socialist and Radical Government of M. Léon Blum, powerless in the face of the disorganising exigencies of his Communist Left Wing, and it profoundly affected the vital strength of the nation.

Socially, France had scarcely begun to rediscipline herself. Hard work had come to be regarded as discreditable. Laziness had been raised to a principle, it had almost been glorified. The Communist poison had been allowed to seep into the veins of the working class, hitherto revolutionary and quick to assert its rights, but fundamentally sound. It had invaded Government offices, already undermined over a long period by the corruption of politicians. Slowness, unwillingness, when it was not actual dishonesty, had impaired the working of many of the wheels of the administrative machinery, and those functionaries who were proud of the body to which they

belonged had looked on with sorrow and discouragement at this slow degradation.

Politically the existing régime had nothing of true Parliamentarism but the name and the outward show. Between the parties, and between the leaders within the parties, things had grown worse than ever: it was a struggle without quarter. For the parties it was a question of winning more votes, always more votes, in order to gain the majority. For the leaders, once the party had the majority, the object was to lay hands on what they characteristically termed the controlling levers: in other words, the Ministries, at least the important ones, the high positions, the administrative posts, the means of taking and giving positions, many positions, ever more positions, positions for all and sundry!

Since a majority is necessary, and it is the people who give it with their voting papers, they shall be promised everything and more besides. They shall never be told that they have duties towards themselves. They shall be assured that there are no bounds to their will, that, like the Roman Emperor, fallen into doltishness, for example, they can make a Consul of their horse. The State Treasury shall be thrown open to them, so that they can delve into it without being warned that after the plundering, when there is nothing more in the public chest, they will have to go on the tramp to refill it and tighten their belts meanwhile. Before their dazzled eyes the prospect of a new golden age shall be dangled, in which there will be no more rich, because everyone will be rich, and where they will reach the promised land of that chimera, equality. But the people shall not be told that if there are no longer any poor, it will be because everyone will be poor.

No doubt this evil does not date from yesterday. It goes back to the birth of the first tribe. It was rife in ancient Rome as in ancient Greece, and in times less remote as well. But let us not forget that whenever it has flaunted itself as shamelessly and as completely as

## Edouard Daladier and Declaration of War 75

in the last years of the French Republic, the peoples died of it.

Would the passing from the state of peace to the state of war give rise to a salutary reaction? It did, but only in part, and more on the surface than deep down.

M. Daladier, at this decisive hour, was in charge. He was qualified to dare, if not to succeed. Sprung from the marrow of the people, having inherited from a long line of workers, upright and unsparing of themselves, an attachment as much physical as moral for the soil, together with certain rules of political honesty and of honesty in general, the baker's son, for such he liked to recall that he was, had, by the historical studies to which his student days had been devoted, exalted his faith in the destiny of Republican France, and in the France of all time.

His active participation in the war of 1914-18 had left him memories of the "horrors of war" which inclined him towards peaceful solutions: but he was loth to sacrifice to them the smallest fragment of the dignity of the nation. He had undergone Munich, and found it no matter for boasting. Perceiving the densely massed crowd from the aeroplane which was bringing him back to Le Bourget from the Bavarian capital, he had suspected a hostile riot. He had therefore been the more surprised at the enthusiastic reception which a kind of hysterical yearning for peace won him from the population of Paris.

He had gained as a result an enormous popularity, and his ambition was to use it to restore to France the political, economic and social balance she had lost—not but what he was in part to blame for it—and to re-establish her military strength, weakened by faults of which he had just gauged the ravages. But he had not all the possibilities for doing so.

Leader of a democratic party situated between the so-called "moderate" Republicans and the Socialists, and nearer the latter than the former, at least in electoral campaigns: greatly concerned in consequence not to give

a handle to the demagoguery of his dangerous neighbours who, at the polls of May, 1936, had already wrested from him the pre-eminence among what the French political vocabulary terms the Left, M. Edouard Daladier, jealously watched, in addition, in his own party by rivals as ruthless as they were crafty, reckoned that he would attain his goal more easily by adaptability, conciliation and the slow preparation of the decisive actions than by audacity and speed. He was confirmed in the choice of this method by his own natural temperament.

His rough appearance and aggressive thrusts in party battles had created for him a legendary reputation for energy which was only half true. He had more bluntness than real strength of will. He was even weak, for he was good-natured with regard to the men, the friends, the politicians of similar views to his own, the collaborators whom he could not bring himself to strike down, dismiss or change when they had merited such treatment. He was justly proud of the credit which the people, as a whole, accorded him, but he did not draw on that credit the draft which he could and should draw: and that from fear of counter-shocks, mistrust of others and distrust of himself: these were so many reactions preserved in him by the memory of that tragic February 6th, 1934, when, in the course of a horrible misunderstanding, he had been held responsible for the bloodshed. That day can justifiably be described as tragic, not only because, in an incomprehensible riot there were dead and wounded in the Place de la Concorde, but because, as rejoinder to it, came the formation of the "Popular Front," that hybrid coalition in which, as we have indicated, the excesses of Communist demagoguery and partisan reprisals destroyed the healthily democratic element that it contained.

It is already sufficiently well known that the errors committed helped to weaken the material strength, as well as the social and moral strength of France. It was to the task of making good the damage—after having had

## Edouard Daladier and Declaration of War 77

his share in the responsibility for it—that M. Daladier had been devoting his efforts since his return to power as head of the Government.

The success with which (thanks to the measures taken on his instructions by M. Langeron, a Prefect of Police as shrewd as he was courageous) he had broken at the end of October, 1938, the general strike fomented by the Communists, ought to have given him the measure of the authority and power he could command in anything he undertook for the organisation of the war and for the safety of the country.

I am not convinced that he did have a thorough idea of it: rather, I am persuaded that he had not enough confidence in himself. He was never guilty in his intentions. He had the best, but his power of action did not match them. It was, in any case, lessened by scruples which led the way to indecision.

“The night brings counsel,” people are apt to say when they want to hesitate. Perhaps M. Daladier asked this service of too many successive nights. Possibly this was the case at that psychological moment when it was a matter of replacing a Ministry, conceived in time of peace, according to the proportions of parties and groups, by one less in conformity with the habits of a Parliamentarism at once false and fusty, a Ministry solid, concentrated, composed of men of proved ability, strong in spirit and ardent of will. At a time when by precipitating matters he had some chance of succeeding, he allowed himself to be stopped by obstacles which skilful animosities contrived to place in his path.



## Chapter VII

### M. Daladier at Grips with Party Passions

M. DALADIER SEEKS TO FORM A GREAT WAR MINISTRY AND TO CHANGE THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS—A MEMORY OF A CHAUTEMPES CABINET—BARRAGE AGAINST M. LÉON BLUM—M. HERRIOT OFFERED THE POST OF FOREIGN SECRETARY—LONG-STANDING RIVALRY BETWEEN HERRIOT AND DALADIER—M. HERRIOT WANTS TO BE "COVERED" BY MARSHAL PÉTAINE—THE MARSHAL'S VETO AGAINST HERRIOT

THE Ministerial changes for which the public were waiting assumed in M. Daladier's projects a twofold aspect. First—To broaden the base of the Government and to bring together in united, resolute war action eminent men representative of the different currents of opinion.

Second—To replace M. Georges Bonnet, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, against whom a stormy tide was rising, by someone whose name should be synonymous with anti-German rigour.

He threw out feelers towards one, then towards another. Appeal to the Communists was obviously ruled out for manifold reasons, the most forceful of which was their equivocal attitude which was soon to become resolutely guilty with regard to the German-Soviet pact. They were to put themselves outside the nation, whose wreckers they already were.

Men of sense, on the other hand, suggested bringing back into the Councils of the Government delegates of the Socialist party, even of the General Confederation of Labour, whose influence over the working classes might be

the more important because there were already murmurs of indignation against "the treachery of Moscow"; to do this would be to put into effect the formula known in the French political vocabulary as "from Blum to Marin." But if M. Marin, leader of the Republican Federation (Right, Conservative and Catholic) agreed to take his place alongside certain Socialists, he laid his veto on the name of M. Léon Blum, around whom had crystallised all the resentments, all the fury, both rightful and unjust, which had been aroused by the three "Popular Front" Ministries, in the first two of which he had been the figure-head, and in the third the main beam.

Now, since the Socialists had gone to war against M. Daladier, M. Marin had been his most faithful supporter. M. Daladier was clearly anxious not to throw him into the opposition camp: the result would have been to cause him, by a conjunction of extremes, to fall between two stools. M. Daladier who had, indeed, no kind of soft spot for M. Blum, for he had had frequent political differences with him, would presumably employ so much the less persuasive energy in trying to weaken M. Marin's hostility, for the reason that, while he heard the Socialists loyal to M. Blum make their support contingent on his presence in the Government—"Blum or no one"—the other members of the S.F.I.O., impatient of the intellectual superiority of their leader and egged on by M. Paul Faure's hatred, laid down as their own condition of co-operation: "If Blum, then Paul Faure also."

Let us add that the friends of M. Flandin, and many—though not all—economic groups of employers would not hear of the presence in the Councils of the Government of M. Léon Blum, still less of a member of the C.G.T., like M. Jouhaux, whose coming into power would, according to them be tantamount to the re-establishment of the social and economic policy which he represented. They recalled that the precipitate and rigid application of the forty-hour week, to quote but one of their grievances,

had contributed to the disorganising of production and especially that of armaments and aeroplanes.

They had not forgotten what had happened in September, 1937. Under the pressure of M. Georges Bonnet, Minister of Finance at that time, M. Camille Chautemps, who had succeeded M. Léon Blum as President of the Council of Ministers, had ended by admitting the urgency of a social recovery, as a prelude to a political recovery, both alike necessary for a lasting financial recovery which was indispensable for the pursuance of the recovery in the land and air forces demanded by the rising international temperature. A sensational declaration which was to figure in French political annals under the title of the "Rambouillet Declaration" had been drawn up. M. Chautemps had reserved his final approval of it until the return of M. Léon Blum, who was away at the moment, and whose support, moreover, he flattered himself he would obtain. This delay caused M. Georges Bonnet some uneasiness.

"I know what will happen," he said. "Léon will wring his hands in gestures of despair and entreaty, he will suggest the suppression of one line, the one that matters, and the insertion of another, thoroughly pernicious, without which he would declare himself obliged to refer the point to the party, and even to withdraw his support from the Government. Camille will feel as though the legs of his chair are cracking beneath the weight of his emotion, and will allow his courage and resolution to bow before what he will call in the Parliamentary jargon, governmental and political solidarity."

That, roughly, is actually what occurred, perhaps, incidentally, because M. Camille Chautemps did not know how to appeal to the sense of patriotic responsibility which sometimes, as had been proved in other circumstances, overcame in M. Blum the spirit of partisan obedience.

There was, indeed, a "declaration." But emptied of its main substance, it had no more than a fleeting effect,

## M. Daladier at Grips with Party Passions 81

taking the purely spectacular form of big headlines in the newspapers. The humdrum round of public affairs in France went on as usual, laborious and chaotic, until the thunderclap of the *Anschluss*, when the Government of M. Chaumets disappeared like a ghost which at the least rustle of a leaf vanishes into the night.

The opponents of M. Léon Blum would not listen for a moment if someone hinted that the lesson of events was not lost on an intelligence as subtle as the Socialist leader's. They would not allow that he nourished in his heart a love, at once instinctive, personal and resolute, for the country of the Revolution which freed his ancestors, and where his forbears had rooted themselves deep; neither, finally, would they admit that, were he given an effective share in the responsibility for the conduct of the war, he would display so much the more zeal in urging on the working class towards more intensive production, for having a clear vision of the collective and personal disaster which defeat would be.

This attitude was more than was needed to discourage M. Daladier from going any further in this direction. Was he not, besides, more than persecuted by the ambitious who came to offer service in the Cabinet, when they did not actually demand it? This man invoked a fugitive promise, that the rights which the presidency of such and such a commission conferred upon him; a third disguised a threat in the editorial of a confidential newspaper, while others had recourse to every imaginable means of pressure.

If he yielded to one, for one chosen there would be ten malcontents, ten enemies. If he satisfied the demands of several, he would have to turn out an equivalent number of people already in office, and they would not forgive him for it. There were some, moreover, who formed, as it were, part of the national furniture: to lay a finger on them, to do without them, would be a sacrilege.

In this state of affairs could he make just one change and replace the man in office at the Quai d'Orsay? To

achieve this, he had a heroic thought. He would ask M. Edouard Herriot to give up the Presidency of the Chamber and assume the direction of Foreign Affairs. This was, on his part, a victory over his personal feelings. No one in French political circles was unaware that the relations between M. Edouard Daladier and M. Edouard Herriot were as inwardly hostile as they were outwardly correct.

M. Daladier was the younger. He was still in the background when his senior, who was already in the forefront of the stage and who had been his professor at the Lyons *lycée*, summoned him on the morrow of the 1924 elections to join his Government as Minister for the Colonies. One might have thought at this period that there would never be a trace of the smallest cloud between the two Edouards. To what are we to ascribe the real cause of their moral separation? Was M. Daladier's ambition too keen to put up for long with a secondary rôle? Did the patronising tone of the ex-professor for the ex-pupil, of the general for the lieutenant, gradually irritate the aggressive susceptibility of M. Daladier who, moreover, took offence at M. Herriot's preferences for the constant pliability and deference of M. Camille Chautemps? To show exactly what repercussions the Daladier-Chautemps rivalry had on the convulsive movements of French policy it would be necessary to write the tedious history of this policy. Were there hidden clashes which turned Herriot and Daladier into intimate enemies, condemned as members of the same political congregation to walk together as friends?

The fact remains that, in 1926, when M. Herriot was constrained to enter the Government of M. Poincaré, already formed under the sign of the restoration of French finances, M. Daladier headed a movement of revolt, and carried off by force the presidency of the Radical Party, which M. Herriot, helpless, abandoned in preference to allowing it to be wrested from him.

Since then they had not ceased to be permanently rival

leaders in the same political army. When they spoke of one another in private they were by turns ironical, acrid, severe, never kindly. In public they affected mutual regard, but it did not go beyond superficial expression accompanied by negative reservations. They never helped one another and, when they could, thwarted each other. In the Chamber of Deputies M. Herriot did not exercise in favour of M. Daladier the various prerogatives which allow the man who presides to ward off *unforeseen difficulties* from the Head of the Government. Furthermore, M. Herriot was still smarting from the masterly skill with which, some months previously, M. Daladier, by instigating the re-election of M. Lebrun, had barred his way (and that of M. Piétri, M. Bouisson, champion of M. Laval, M. Queuille, and others as well) to the Presidency of the Republic.

But "it's war." Abruptly the old quarrels grew blurred in M. Daladier's mind. He had gone the round of the men qualified to represent before the world democratic France at war, with the maximum of credit, experience, culture and intellectual probity. In the scales of merit, M. Herriot unquestionably carried the most weight. He was the Frenchman whose name in America had the prestige of being that of the Premier, who, at the beginning of 1933, had preferred to sacrifice his Government rather than follow the gross error of a foolish majority who insisted on the cessation of payment of interest on the war debt to the United States.

M. Herriot could not believe his ears when M. Daladier made the offer on which he had just decided. Probably he suspected a manœuvre. His critical mind had speedily reckoned up the honour done him by the one from whom he least expected it, together with the responsibilities he would incur, the services he might be able to render, and the enmities which would quickly arise. "Come, it is your duty," was what he was being told. "At the Quai d'Orsay we need a faith, a doctrine, a capable head, endurance ; in short, a man."

"What for?" he objected.

The policy that had been pursued was not his, at least in several essential respects. A campaign of disparagement would be undertaken. The alarm would be raised in Italy and Spain, in both which countries he would be denounced as incapable of reviving our friendship for them; through him, France would be injured.

"It will be a matter of frank conversation with the Ambassadors, of telegrams to the Heads of States, of speeches before Parliament and over the air," he was repeatedly assured. "And, indeed, the harder the task, the more urgent it becomes and the more pressing is the duty to undertake it."

"In that case I want to be covered."

"How?"

"Let Marshal Pétain enter the Cabinet in some capacity or other, whilst I join it as Minister for Foreign Affairs."

Let us pause a minute at this seemingly trivial fact. M. Herriot wanted to be covered, and the cover he asked for was Marshal Pétain. Why? Because Marshal Pétain who, as Ambassador in Spain, was readjusting and re-harmonising relations between General Franco and France to the best of his ability, would, by his entry into the Ministry, stand surety in the eyes of the Spanish Nationalists for the new Foreign Minister who had been guilty of having formerly desired the success of the "Reds." Note that he could have stood surety for him just as well by staying in Madrid. But that is not my point. What I want to make stand out like a beacon is the fact that, from the very beginning of the war, there was a man whose lot was determined. He was to be the "cover" man. And this man was poor Marshal Pétain, whose misfortunes were beginning.

Did he not go to Spain, and would he not be recalled from there for no other object than to play the part of the Hoodwinked Prince in a piece which might well be called "*The Republic and the Puppet*"? We shall come across him again later, alas!

## M. Daladier at Grips with Party Passions 85

M. Daladier was the less able to refuse what M. Herriot demanded for being personally on the best of terms with the Marshal, whom he had overwhelmed with respectful homage when he had asked him to "Go and save France" at San Sebastian and Madrid. They telephoned to the Marshal. The Marshal asked for time to think the matter over. The Marshal took the train.

This is where M. Daladier's bad luck came in—and ours, too. There should have been no waiting. It was imperative that the Marshal should accept, and if he refused, to use compulsion with Herriot to force him to *sacrifice himself*, seeking, if necessary, another "cover" for him, since he absolutely insisted on one. Instead of that they allowed themselves a delay. While the Marshal's train was rumbling along, people "talked" in Paris, where everything is quickly known. The scheme of "Herriot at the Quai" became an open secret, and there was an equally open stir. A terrifying barrage was hastily put up against Herriot. Georges Bonnet, as is readily understood since he was the Iphigenia vowed to the sacrifice, let his friends loose. Piétri raised arms to heaven and exclaimed in the lobbies of the Chamber: "If they want to precipitate Italy into the war at once, they're going the best way about it."

For a long time past Pierre Laval had had his eye on the "Pétain cover" for the day when he would have need of it: not that that was the word he used: he called it "mantelpiece ornament," and fully intended to reserve it for himself; but he took care not to show his head, and it was from a hiding place that he directed against Herriot the fire of several machine-guns: "If they want to lose Spain altogether . . ."

He had the alarm passed on to Marin, or someone of his party, who raised the scarecrow of "Herriot-Soviet!"

At last the Marshal's train reached the station. Someone waited for him and took him away. Who was it? Ah! It was, I can tell you, a friend of Laval. I don't know



what he whispered in his ear, but when the Marshal found himself face to face with M. Daladier, it was to say to him: "My dear President, I am at your orders. But *veto against Herriot.*"

The President of the Council employed every oratorical means of persuasion. There was nothing to be done. Pétain, who had remembered his lesson well, remained inexorable. Daladier had lost his game. Herriot remained Speaker of the Chamber, satisfied, after all, with the discomfiture of Daladier; Pétain returned to Madrid.

No other course was left open to M. Daladier than to add to his responsibilities of Premier, Minister of National Defence and Minister of War, that of Minister for Foreign Affairs. That was what he did, providing himself with two crutches, an Under-Secretary of State at the War Ministry, and another at the Quai d'Orsay. Their names will not be remembered on the scroll of history.

He created two new Ministries—that of Blockade and that of Armament. To this latter he summoned M. Dautry who, in his various earlier positions, had deserved a great reputation for his "go," his decision, and his aptitude for managing men. From the point of view of physical endurance he was not quite the man he had been some years before. He was already past his best, for so many bad habits are acquired in Government offices, which have valuable opportunities to waste, but in any case the events at Bordeaux were to render his office useless. As for M. Georges Bonnet, he went into premature semi-retirement at the Ministry of Justice, vacant owing to the resignation of M. Marchandeau. He was soon to transform it into the general headquarters of defeatism.

As for the great Ministry . . . that should be for another occasion. When M. Daladier had at last resolved upon it, something would happen to prevent it. Little causes, great effects. M. Daladier's luck was running low. And France did not have much, either.

## Chapter VIII

### The Condition of the French Navy, Army and Air Force in 1939

THE FRENCH NAVY HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER—ADMIRAL DARLAN—INFERIORITY OF THE FRENCH AIR FORCE—M. GUY LA CHAMBRE—SECRET SESSION OF FEBRUARY, 1939—ATTACK AND DEFENCE—THE MAGINOT LINE—GENERAL GAMELIN—GENERAL DE GAULLE, A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS—THE WAR OF WAITING—THE OPINIONS OF GENERAL DEBENEY, GENERAL HUNTZIGER AND GENERAL BUHRER—UNHEEDED INSISTENCE OF MR. HORE BELISHA—THE “WAR OF ROT”

IF, when war broke out in September, 1939, political France did not show healthy symptoms, as the examination we have just made certainly proves, what about military France? Were the forces of land and air, was the fleet, in sound condition? Or, to be more exact, what was their apparent condition, for it was only the test of battle that could show their real worth?

Of the Navy there was little to say, because one could only speak good of it, good which was to reveal itself entirely true. Never, for a very long time, had the French fleet been so well fitted to fulfil its every function. All the Ministers of Marine who had followed one another at the Rue Royale since, and including, Georges Leygues, who had been the initiator, whether Charles Dumont, Albert Sarraut, François Piétri, Dumesnil or Campinchi, had set their hearts on restoring to France, and then maintaining, a naval force worthy of her glorious past and of the needs of the Empire.

Personally, they had probably not had any original ideas, but they vigorously defended before Parliament the programmes drawn up by admirals in whom they placed their confidence, and particularly in one of them, Admiral Darlan, for whom the title of Admiral of the Fleet was created, corresponding for the sea forces to that of Generalissimo on land.

This child of the Lot and Garonne, son of a politician who attained Cabinet rank, inherited the tartness of mind of his ancestors on his father's side, but there was something of Brittany in his blood, too, and it was perhaps to the predominance of this that he owed the old sea-dog air of which he was not a little proud. Pipe in mouth, tanned of cheek, keen-eyed, decisive of speech, firmly planted on his legs, he conveyed to those with eyes to see, an impression of quiet strength and staunch energy. He would be, *almost* until the unhappy end, the man freely held up as an example of firmness of spirit. . . . Never shrinking from action, and condemned, if spite insisted on finding a weakness in him, to be suspected rather of rashness than of excessive prudence; and, above everything else, avid of glory for his fleet and for France. . . . I can hear him, as though I were still there, voicing in his warm Southern tones his yearning to go and try conclusions in the Mediterranean with the Italian navy . . . and with what pride for the battles to come he spoke of his *Dunkerque* and his *Richelieu*!

I met him for the last time on February 24th, leaving the council room of the Premier and Minister of National Defence. It was shortly after the *Altmark* affair.

"Aren't we going to take a high hand with the Norwegians?" I asked him. "Surely we're not going to wait until the Germans have got in there first?"

He answered, as I well remember: "If that rested with me only, it would be done already. It's the English who are hesitating—always late!"

I cannot believe that, since June 17th, 1940, he has

been the Minister of Marine of the capitulation. . . . His past, his stout heart, everything about him was above that . . . or else? But it is not the moment to put that question.

Much has been said of the undeniable inferiority in which the French army of the air stagnated in comparison with the Royal Air Force, and, of course, still more beside the huge stocks of Marshal Goering.

In the autumn of 1937, M. Camille Chautemps, who had succeeded M. Léon Blum as head of the French Government, went to London with M. Delbos, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to exchange views with the British Cabinet, and to have a general discussion on questions of common interest to the two peoples.

M. Camille Chautemps will not contradict me, for it was from him that I had the information, if I disclose that the British Government, in the friendliest spirit, emphasised the importance that aviation would assume in the event of war, and inquired discreetly about the progress of French production. M. Chautemps was alarmed by the statistics examined concerning Germany, England, Russia and France.

On his return, I can well understand that he had to summon councils and commissions. I don't know what they decided. They had to ask for credits. Were they given them? Until then people had consoled themselves by saying—it was still the period of fatal illusions—that in a European conflict the Russian air force would cover the deficiencies of the French. Did they continue to think so?

Admittedly some advance had been made since then: but certainly not enough. There was no more talk of the Russian air force, and for good reason. As for our factories, it was notorious among the public that they were not yet working at the pace to be desired. Since the turning point in the social history of the time when the general strike of October, 1938, had been broken, some

improvement had been secured, but on many points the Communist cell inspired a ca' canny policy and maintained, among the trades union claims, hostility to overtime.

M. Guy la Chambre had become Air Minister. It was asserted later that he was unequal to his task. I lack the means of investigation necessary to destroy or confirm allegations, some at least of which derived their inspiration from personal jealousy and political rivalry, from the bitterness of constructors who had been ousted or were simply dissatisfied, or from the cabal of supposedly wronged officers, engineers and pilots. What I do know is that at the secret session of the Chamber in February, 1939, he was violently attacked, and appeared to have victorious answers to criticisms directed against his management of his department. He declared that since his arrival at the Boulevard Victor enormous progress had been made in speeding up the production both of fuselages and engines. What I can bear witness to is his goodwill, zest for work and patriotic fervour.

Did he lack the authority to break the resistance of a ministerial organisation, where, as elsewhere, and even more than elsewhere, the dynamic force of some came into collision with the bureaucratic inertia of others? Was he unable always to expose, in the delays he deplored, the consequences of an outworn air policy which constantly tended to defer a definite order under the pretext of improving on the type to be chosen? Did the Ministry of Labour not give him soon enough the support necessary to arouse the deficient energies of misled workers organisations? Did not the Ministry of Finance dole out credits far too parsimoniously, in accordance with inveterate tradition, credits which should have been thrown uncounted into the forge in order to endow France with a powerful aerial fleet?

In such matters financial imprudence is better than respect for orthodoxy. M. Guy la Chambre experienced this, and naturally France herself, when at the beginning

of the war he did not hesitate to suggest to his leader purchases in America.

There was a fine outcry set up by some of the industrialists; and yet they were unable to meet the orders that had been given to them! They were invaluable, those American planes, having only the defect of being too few for our squadrons, where eager pilots were impatiently awaiting their arrival.

Later, when he was Premier, M. Reynaud must have regretted, if he had time, the veto he laid, as keeper of the purse in his capacity as Minister of Finance, on a programme denounced as too costly because too vast. The sacrosanct administration of the Finance Ministry had decided in agreement with the Bank of France, where Inspection of Finances was enthroned, that the war would last three years, that both mentally and in practice the gold reserves must be divided into three equal heaps, the second never to be mortgaged before the proper date for touching it had come! That was called making provision for the future! Where is the future?\*

\* As regards this matter of the purchase of aeroplanes in America a personal friend of M. Paul Reynaud was anxious to give me an explanation of what would otherwise be a misunderstanding of the position: "What M. Paul Reynaud was unwilling to do," he has told me by word of mouth and letter, "was not to buy American machines in great number, but to buy them blindly. In order to husband resources and to balance the requirements in foreign currency of the various Ministerial departments, he had to know both the needs of each department for the work in progress, and the provision to be made for future programmes. It was impossible to obtain a comprehensive plan or definite statements of the future needs of the Ministry. This impossibility, moreover, was due to the fact that the High Command having no exact idea of modern warfare, instead of giving systematic orders to the various services, allowed them to cover their responsibility by heaping up, without any order of preference or priority, the stocks whose acquisition justified their existence.

"It was while trying to effect the indispensable preliminary work of clarifying the various needs that the ambition came over M. Reynaud to take charge of the Ministry of National Defence, where he felt it was necessary to carry out a task of systematic reorganisation similar to that which he had successfully performed at the Rue de Rivoli."

M. Guy la Chambre, in any case, will give his own explanation in the presence of the judges at Riom. In July he had left, on a legitimate mission, for America. Implicated in the proceedings instituted against various politicians over the question of his conduct of affairs, he immediately returned to France and gave himself up in order to be at the side of Edouard Daladier, his leader and his friend. M. Guy la Chambre's decision will not surprise those who witnessed the courage he has displayed at various periods in his career. This Breton, sprung from a long line of St. Malo shipowners, is hot of blood and swift of retort. He will not allow charges which by rights should burden others to be laid on his shoulders, and if there should be any which are properly his, he will know how to bear them.

Be that as it may, whether the blame for French inferiority in the air, which goes a long way back, can be partly imputed or not to Peter or Paul, to James, or to all three, what is certain is that the German air force was dangerously superior to ours.

As for the heads of the air force, what was their true worth? They were known to be brave. That is all one could say of them before the use of a weapon, which, after all, was virtually new, had revealed whether on one side or the other there was a strategy and a doctrine of aerial tactics, and which were the best.

If France had fewer planes than Germany, she also had fewer tanks, less artillery and a small number of divisions; but she possessed a breastplate which certain vigilant Frenchmen had made her. This was the line of fortifications commonly called the Maginot Line. But, to be quite accurate, it was due to the initiative of Painlevé, the insistence of General Debeney, Chief of the General Staff at the time, and to the Parliamentary courage of Maginot, as well as to the organising genius of a senior officer—his name has escaped my memory for the moment—who carried out the scheme with scrupulous care.

In so far as he himself was concerned, General Debeney has told me in detail what opposition he had to conquer, how personally he overcame the hostility of M. Poincaré by demonstrating to him, Lorrainer that he was, that the fortification would spare the greater part of Eastern France the horrors of invasion. He told me, too, what decisive support was given him by M. Doumergue, then President of the Republic, who showed himself at once a determined champion of the project. At Cabinet meetings and by his talks with members of Parliament, M. Doumergue busied himself discreetly in disarming opposition. Let this homage be paid to him in passing!

Mobilisation had been carried out "under good conditions"; at least, so they said. They always say that. It's a rite. Moreover, it had not been disturbed in any way, since Hitler had decided to throw the full extent of his efforts into the onrush on Poland, and to stay on the defensive in the West. In spite of numerous deficiencies, notably in clothes, stores and blankets, whereby the Quartermaster General's Department remained true to its time-honoured reputation for red tape, negligence and slowness, French opinion and opinion abroad were at one, though with certain doubts in France, in reckoning on the legendary worth of the French army.

Rightly or wrongly, some generals have a reputation which is spread far and wide by currents of unknown origin, and the Generalissimo himself, General Gamelin, enjoyed the celebrity proper to a Commander-in-Chief, whose photograph appeared in cinemas on the morrow of military reviews, and whose name occurred frequently in the papers in connection with official meetings such as those of the Councils of National Defence, of the War Committees, and especially of the Anglo-French conferences in London and Paris.

Seen at a distance, he inspired sympathy, thanks to a countenance at once serious and modest, around which, in the eyes of those who looked at it, his title and his



mission set an aureole. Seen close at hand he was reserved and affable, and gave the impression of being an intelligent and able man. When considered by the uninitiated in a strictly military light, it was remembered in his favour that he had been on the staff of Joffre, and had drawn up for the use of the army commanders orders dictated to him in rough outline by the Generalissimo of 1914.

In his official relations, he was the perfect diplomat. Some people reproached him with being a political functionary, a "military Prefect," as Mandel put it, and with making his opinions conform with the wishes, which he had previously gauged, of those who asked him for them. In the army there was a clan which was firmly attached to him: there was another which set up the standard of General Georges, and wanted to knock Gamelin off his pedestal.

General Georges was in command of the armies of the north-east, which included the area of the Maginot Line. He was directly under the orders of General Gamelin, who was inter-allied chief. The two had different headquarters. Those of General Gamelin were at the gates of Paris, at Vincennes. This had advantages and drawbacks: the advantage of being quite near the centre of power, within twenty minutes drive of the Premier and War Minister, and of enabling him to exercise almost daily in his own favour and in that of his ideas, if he had any, the influence of his presence: the drawback of enduring the first repercussions of general dissatisfaction, if such took place, of being too often monopolised by bureaucratic papers and red tape, and, above all, of being in contact with the armies, both commanders and troops, only rarely or on official visits. Neither Joffre nor Foch, in the other war, ever had their headquarters at Vincennes, and they only came to Paris at infrequent intervals, as seldom as possible.

In the political world Gamelin had powerful supporters

and formidable opponents. Among the latter, let us note, the better to understand future standpoints and decisions, appeared M. Paul Reynaud, who had gained the friendship of several generals and senior officers, notably when he was preparing a Bill for the creation of motorised divisions. One of these officers was to become, unfortunately too late, an outstanding figure. He had made a thorough study of the use of the tank, the armoured car and the armoured division. He had written books on the subject, which had been smiled at as the vagaries of a maniac, and to whose prescience homage would only be paid when his system had been tried out by the German army at the expense of the French. He was then only a Colonel. You have recognised him? I am speaking of General de Gaulle.

I make the point, without delay, that Colonel de Gaulle did not feel that his conscience was set at rest by his books. He foresaw the danger, he denounced it. He drew up report after report. The Germans had just put his method to the test in Poland, and the effects had been electrifying. What they had done in Silesia, in Pomerania, on the road to Warsaw, they would do one day on the roads of France. Their brilliant success would be a lesson for them which they would immediately follow up. They would double, treble, perhaps multiply tenfold the number of their motorised divisions. They would not consider the expense, not they! At least let us profit by the lesson, too!

I regret to have to say that General de Gaulle was not listened to. What did this tiresome fellow want with his statements. War isn't made with statements. The first had been read—right, that's all very well. The wastepaper basket was the place for the rest. I believe they never reached the Premier-Minister of National Defence, and if one of them did get as far as him, someone would have been sure to put M. Daladier on his guard against this officer, who would do better to occupy himself with his duties than to try and instruct his superiors in the art

of war! Just see how the German motorised divisions fare against the Maginot Line! They'll learn that the Polish army and the French army are not the same thing! What *is* the same thing is the force of inertia.

Before 1914, heavy artillery had been boycotted, and a man like General Maîtro, who had constantly raised the warning cry of alarm, saw himself treated as an old dug-out. The same contemptuous expression could scarcely be applied to young de Gaulle. But to Gamelin he would be decried as an undisciplined reformer, and Gamelin's staff would decry him to M. Daladier by labelling him a "friend of Reynaud's," for already in Reynaud's circle antipathy to Daladier was being exploited, and in Daladier's set antipathy against Reynaud, the beginning of a story unhappily great with consequences.

The relations between General Gamelin and M. Daladier were subject to variations, rain, if not storm, alternating with fine weather. It would require scant effort of memory to recall on the subject of the Commander-in-Chief many remarks, now laudatory, now evasive. Laudatory, when the occasion was, for instance, the morrow of a meeting of the War Committee or the Supreme Council, at which Gamelin had shown himself a dignified representative of the French army and the Government: evasive when waves of criticism directed against the Generalissimo also splashed M. Daladier with their foam. He would agree, then ask:

"Then who is it to be? Georges? Hm! He's an intriguer. I don't like that. Huntziger? He's well spoken of, but the evidence of battles has not yet shown in favour of anyone."

And when would the evidence of battles be forthcoming? One of the Rue St. Dominique set used to amuse himself by saying: "Gamelin's motto is a verse of Baudelaire's: 'I hate that movement which shifts the lines.'"

But no one concerned himself with being the person who would *shift the lines*, least of all M. Daladier—here I

am running ahead of the chronological order of events—whose policy was to extend as long as possible the duration of this “rum war,” in other words, the war of waiting in holes without fighting. Nor was it calculated to displease Gamelin for, while it lasted, his reputation would not be put to the test and, all things considered, the reasons which were those of M. Daladier must also have been his: and that sufficiently explains why, despite clashes and without any great leaning towards him, the Prime Minister kept him at the head of the armies.

And Daladier's reasons? He has often expressed them, and I have no need to call upon personal recollections. Many a time, in resounding speeches, he proclaimed himself niggard of French blood. Did he not even congratulate himself publicly on the months of military inaction, thanks to which it was possible, step by step, to remedy the French inferiority in arms and aeroplanes? He maintained that for a country whose population was barely on the increase, earth and concrete were the best weapons of war. Frequently, I am sure, he must have regretted in his moments of meditation that the Painlevé-Maginot Line had not been extended from Montmédy to the sea, and did not cover the whole north-eastern frontier of France from Bâle to the advanced posts of Dunkirk, which would not have ruled out the formation of an army ready for every eventuality, whether a break through on the west or an offensive.

Haunted by the thought of the enemy avalanche, knowing that months and months must elapse before British and French, combined, could fight the might of Germany on land and in the air on equal terms, he devoted himself—to use a phrase familiar on his lips—to refraining from *troubling the waters*. To gain time, and during that time to construct, construct and go on constructing, and not only to construct but to buy in America, to buy everywhere. Purchases he had ordered in plenty, but still not enough for his liking.

In talking of M. Guy la Chambre, I have already pointed out that, in order to husband the gold resources of the Bank, he had consented to restrict his programme of buying aeroplanes in America. How many times did I not hear him express his remorse for that !

So Daladier would arch his back like a wheedled cat—another of his favourite expressions—and faithful to his plan, go to the length of directing that German agents, who were trying by various devious means to probe his secret intentions, should not be discouraged.

“Let them go on deluding themselves until the second when it would actually be dangerous,” he would say. “All I ask is that the enemy shall carry on the war of inaction as long as possible.”

Our agents would change the subject at the critical moment. Other German emissaries would begin again, and the game went on, without danger.

In the terrible light of events we are now justified in wondering, without being able to blame M. Daladier's reasons, whether this prolonged waiting, in the holes of the Maginot Line and on the straw of improvised billets, which admittedly had the salutary effect of allowing the stocks of supplies, tanks, guns and planes to be built up, must not also have had another, a lowering effect, tending to weaken the spirit of officers and soldiers alike, and disposing them to be swayed by demoralising propaganda. Cruel alternative !

One day I asked the opinion of General Debeney, one of the great victors of the other war. He had retained all the lucidity of an exceptional intelligence, but his services were not called upon, even though he was kept on the active list on the strength of having commanded an army in the face of the enemy.

His reply was categorical.

“Gamelin is right not to attempt an offensive,” he told me. “He ought to have done it at the very start when the Germans were kept busy in Poland, if King Leopold

had not broken the Anglo-French-Belgian alliance of his father, and if we had been able to swoop down on Cologne by way of Belgium. The Siegfried Line was not extended as far as that, and we should have secured valuable pledges. But as he was not able to carry out that operation, the Commander-in-Chief is right not to throw the French troops against the defences of the Siegfried Line. Although it is less strong than the Maginot Line, because it is newer, and concrete is like the vine and becomes sturdier with age, it would be madness to go and shatter armies against it which must be preserved until the day when the British and ourselves have the superiority in material. Everything must be subordinated to this essential programme—to gain superiority in material and, meanwhile, *to maintain the morale of the army and the country.*”

Without compromising him, I can also invoke the opinion of a great commander, General Huntziger, on whom many hopes were founded, but who was never put in a position to justify them, since—alas!—the only great duty he was called upon to perform was the most sorrowful one which could be laid upon him—that of going to Rethondes to receive the ignominious armistice terms.

Sitting at a table in a friend's house, he put forward ideas identical with General Debeney's, laying especial stress on these :

*“ We weren't ready; we aren't ready. Many, many things were lacking, both from the point of view of armament and from that of the commissariat; above all, in the matter of aviation. Now,”* he said—this was at the end of December, 1939—*“ the essential task is to watch over the morale of the army, to harry the defeatist elements, both on the Right and on the Left, and to effect progressive improvements in the striking power of the army.”*

Another eminent man talked to me in the same strain. This was General Buhrer, the great organiser of the Colonial Army, who was seconded for service on the staff of M. Mandel, the Minister for the Colonies.

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

"The problem," he declared to me, "is to gain the time necessary for us to be, as regards both material and effectives, in a position to be able to win. As for effectives, there is already an army of thousands and thousands of colonials who will become a formidable force of shock troops. But that's not enough. We must bring over many more. The English will have to increase their Expeditionary Force. As for the air and armament potentials, I have no need to point that out to you. How are we to make the soldiers and the public understand that this distressing waiting is necessary? It is for the generals to explain it to the officers, for the officers to explain it to the N.C.O.'s, and for the N.C.O.'s to explain it to the men in the ranks."

"Has that been done?" I asked. "If it hasn't, why not? Why, if not in all the armies, at least in many, have they allowed the troops to weary themselves by inaction, of which all the men who came on leave complained? Wouldn't it have been possible to explain to them by practical exercises the lesson of the Polish campaign, the weapons they would have to oppose, and how they ought to defend themselves against them? Couldn't an enormous number of the men mobilised have been turned on to extend the Maginot Line to the sea, and to construct behind the line itself a second line of withdrawal in case the first should be broken?"

One man asked this question. He was the British Minister of War. In September, 1937, Mr. Horc Belisha had visited the Maginot Line with General Gamelin after the big manoeuvres. The line ended near Givet, and he inquired: "Why don't you continue it?" to receive the answer: "We're engaged in doing so."

Immediately on the outbreak of war he returned to the charge. His argument was as follows: between March and September the Germans had made of the Siegfried Line a fortification almost equal to the Maginot. Between September and March the Maginot Line could be extended

## Condition of French Forces in 1939 101

to the sea. The objection was raised that the winter mud made this kind of work impossible. He consulted engineers and contractors, who proved that special processes would freeze the mud and therefore allow the work to go forward.

Then the flatness of the ground was given as an excuse. To this he replied that it would be as well to say outright that they had no intention of doing anything. Mr. Hore Belisha resigned soon after. If he had remained Minister of War would he have overcome prejudice and the force of inertia? The fact remains that even though a few blockhouses and trenches were constructed, the great enterprise was abandoned. Why? How many more whys!

It has been said of this period of the war, in which there was no fighting, save at outposts, that it was a *war of rot*. If the expression was to find justification, if the army was, *even partially*, to grow rotten as an army, if not man for man, in other words, to lose all combative vitality, all patriotic faith, all reason for victory; if, I say, it was to lose all these qualities which are essential—how is it that the High Command, the Command of Groups of Armies, the Army Commanders and the Army Corps Commanders and, in downward sequence of rank, all the officers—including those entrusted with the task of watching over the morale of the troops—for there were *bureaux du morale*!—how is it that all these men are not informed of it? And how is it that, being informed, they do not react? And, if they do not react, what is the reason? We are putting forward a hypothesis and we have not finished writing it before we are tempted, forestalling the hours, to put the question not in the present, but in the past: Had they then not been informed, and was that why they did not react?



## Chapter IX

### Hitler's Plan of Attack on the Soul of France

THE SOVIETS TAKE THEIR SHARE OF THE BOOTY  
IN POLAND—THE ERRORS OF FRANCO-BRITISH  
POLICY—MARCH 7TH, 1936—HITLER TRIES TO  
DISSOCIATE FRANCE FROM ENGLAND

So we find Poland at grips with her aggressor, and Great Britain and France at war with Hitler. How can they come to the help of their invaded Ally? They have no means of doing so directly. It is not possible to send troops to her.

The French Command, it is true, engages in a cupping or "sucker" operation on the advance posts of the Siegfried Line, but it is no more than a "sucker," that is to say, nothing much, and will only be temporary. The only worth-while enterprise would consist in reminding Belgium of her former solidarity with France and Great Britain, and in asking her for the right of passage so as to be able to probe the enemy on his Belgo-German frontier. But it is not even to be thought of. Leopold III had hastened to proclaim his neutrality, and there can be for the Allies no question of violating it.

During this period the U.S.S.R. does not wait until Hitler's armies have conquered the whole of Poland before claiming her share, and abruptly invades the Polish territories she considers properly Russian. Thus she makes it impossible for Poland, caught between two fires, to maintain an effective resistance. The U.S.S.R. will

not stop at that. Convinced that she will never have a more favourable opportunity, she will draw into her orbit and, in fact, annex to herself the Baltic nations over which for many centuries past Prussia had cherished designs of conquest, fiercely fostered by the famous Baltic "barons" of German origin.

Not only will Hitler not oppose the move, but, anxious not to produce a hostile reaction on the part of the Soviets, and eager to associate their fortunes with his own, at least provisionally, he will yield up the whole area to them, and on his orders there will begin the lamentable exodus towards Poland of Germans who had been settled for many years in Riga, Tallin, and other places.

Once more that Polish independence which the late Chancellor von Bülow considered "*The greatest misfortune that could befall Germany*" is no more. The Polish State, as Herr von Ribbentrop and M. Molotov put it, "is dissolved." "*But a hundred and fifty years of slavery have not succeeded in weakening national feeling in Poland,*" so wrote a Pole who, in spite of the "colonels" of M. Beck, had never ceased to warn his compatriots that the Polish-German Treaty of January 26th, 1934, was the prologue to their future downfall. This Pole was called Sikorski. With a new President of the Polish Republic, M. Raczkiewicz, with M. Zaleski, once again appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs, he formed a national Government in Paris, and undertook the organisation of a Polish Legion. Poland will not be dead.

After the capitulation of France, the Polish Government transferred its activity to England. Unfortunately it was not possible to transport the whole of the Polish army which had been formed in France and which wherever it had been engaged had given proof of exceptional fighting qualities. The contingents which it was possible to save and reorganise in Great Britain are holding an important part of the lines of defence. Polish aviators are distinguishing themselves side by side with their comrades of

the R.A.F. General Sikorski, one of those strong characters of the stuff from which real leaders are made, is the heart and soul of the Polish national resistance.

Let us pause here a moment and reflect. We can do so without injustice to the men who are saving the honour of their country, and who will give her back her independence and integrity. They were the first to think and say what we are about to recall.

Among the remoter causes of the catastrophic events amid which we have been living for years, I mentioned at the beginning of this study the rivalries, differences, conflicts and hatreds between the States which emerged from the ruins of Austria-Hungary. This discord Italy took pleasure in keeping active, as she made sufficiently plain by twice (1922 and 1923) bringing about the failure of plans for Danubian economic union. I claimed that by not allaying these differences, by not settling them by authority if necessary, for then they had the requisite authority, France and England, who had all sorts of arguments at their disposal for persuading these States, and Italy, too, of their real interests, and, if need arose, of compelling their acceptance of them, had contributed, as they contributed in other ways, to the resurrection of imperialistic Germany. Have I need to insist overmuch in order to justify my allegation? Czecho-Slovakia was the first victim of this, and the Poland of Colonel Beck, in return for having allowed the sacrifice, claimed a pound of flesh.

She received it. But scarcely, to use an old hunting phrase, had the end of the quarry been blown, than it was against herself that the knife was turned. An object lesson and a lesson of morality. Beat your breasts, Poles and Czechs, who, instead of uniting, conspired one against the other under the eye of your future executioner. And we Frenchmen, whose hearts are broken by what has been made of our country, and even you British who remain alone to face the world, as Sir Robert Vansittart put it

in a fine line : " I face the world without you, after all " —let us never forget it. Yes, it is our fault, our very great fault, our senseless fault ! Ah ! Many times yet shall we have to accuse ourselves and groan, so many are the crimes against ourselves that we have heaped up, all of us, in international life !

Should I go back as far as the ridiculous quarrels which divided the French and British Governments on the morrow of the Treaty of Versailles ? At that moment British statesmen did really allow themselves to be dominated too much by the old diplomatic routine. Germany was beaten, France was victorious. France was becoming the strongest Continental power ; it was she, therefore, that must be warily watched, whilst poor Germany must be helped to live, to recover. We can see clearly now what that notion was worth !

My loyalty of heart and of reason to the friendship and alliance with Britain gives me, I think, the right to utter this reproach without fear of it being taken amiss. And I freely admit on the other side that some of the French claims and complaints were occasionally presented with an asperity very ill calculated to smooth off corners. But, viewed now after a lapse of years, how trifling were these questions of personages, of wrongs, and fine shades of difference in comparison with the real issue which was to appear in all its importance when Hitler came to power !

I put this question to men of common sense. Was it not evident that the Hitler movement disclosed in Germany a formidable wave of revenge : at least from the moment when the man who had turned the majority of Germans into fanatics took the reins of power into his hands ? Was it not madness to fold one's arms and wait, as in a theatre, to see what was going to happen ? Was it not *then* that our Governments should have revised their programmes of naval, military and aerial armaments, instead of continuing to delight in the Penelope-like task of the Disarmament Commission at Geneva.

## 106 Truth on the Tragedy of France

Finally, more than four years ago, on March 7th, 1936, the German Chancellor violated, tore up and reduced to a thousand shreds a treaty concluded of their own free will by his predecessors, who had asked for it, and which Hitler himself had undertaken to respect. Now he repudiated the Treaty of Locarno, and announced for the next day the remilitarisation of the Rhineland.

That day, after hurling his challenge, Hitler was breathless. His generals had advised against his action. He had overruled them, counting on the pusillanimity and indolence which characterised the policy of France and Great Britain at that time. France and Great Britain remained passive. The French troops did not stir, at a moment when no more than a policing operation was called for. Hitler won. It was on that day that the war which began in September, 1939, was declared! Declared by the deficiency and shirking of France and Great Britain in the face of a clear duty!

Declared by the Ministers of National Defence of the Sarraut Cabinet, General Maurin, Minister of War; M. Piétri, Minister of Marine; M. Déat, Minister of Air; all of whom, to excuse themselves for venturing nothing, took refuge behind the necessity of a general mobilisation! M. Sarraut and M. P. E. Flandin had at first solemnly decided in favour of the act of force. They yielded. M. Pierre Etienne Flandin came back from London with a document testifying to the goodwill of England *for later on*. Ah! living through that, how powerless one felt to prevent the worst folly and the worst cowardice from getting the better of common sense and national interests!

I was one of the few people in the French press to take the risk of rebelling against a weakness which I denounced as "*Putting an assured premium on aggression.*"

"*If France yielded,*" I ventured to write, "*it would be an encouragement to trample her underfoot in another war.*" Some days later when I understood that the irreparable fault was about to be committed, I drew th

conclusion that : *" Nothing would be left but to draw from it every inference in the way of military precautions and alliance."*

But neither the British nor the French Government drew them. They seemed as though paralysed, held fast in bands of iron. It needed many other bludgeon blows before they could extricate themselves from them. It needed the blow of the *Anschluss*, in face of which they were left confounded. It needed the blows of Czecho-Slovakia and Munich ; and after Munich, Prague ; after Prague, Warsaw.

In less than a month Hitler brought his Polish operation to a successful conclusion. He was not without some faint surprise at having encountered so little interference from us. So, however well informed he might be about our military imperfections, he felt distrustful, and that without taking into account his concern over the blockade, drawn ever more tightly by Great Britain and France, whose effects within a longer or shorter term he dreaded. He was uneasy over the plans which London and Paris might be preparing, for he gave us credit for more imagination and boldness than we possessed. So, while laying diplomatic mines against France and Britain combined, in all capitals, in the Orient and in the Balkans, he sought for means to dissociate the two peoples who were friends and allies. This policy he did not invent. It had been the Kaiser's.

On the 1st of January, 1912, Colonel Pellé, the Military Attaché in Berlin, dispatched to his War Minister the following confidential statement made by German authorities :

*" It is highly to be desired that, as between the advantages you derive from the English alliance and the danger of war with Germany, you will not hesitate over the right choice to make. I understand that your position is awkward, but you must expect that one day or another the Germans will call upon you to choose between England and them."*

## 108      Truth on the Tragedy of France

Germany does not change her doctrines, even when she changes her masters. One must be blind or complacent not to make allowance for this fundamental truth. Hitler did not despair of succeeding where William II had failed. He was going to try by every means—threats, flattery, baits of all kinds—to separate England and France. He had formerly paid his court to England and, having failed to dupe her, he turned towards France. Not that he had any affection for her. The hatred which he displayed for her in “*Mein Kampf*” was only allayed in appearance. But he had learned to disguise it, and it would be the more effective, and the more fully gratified, for having taken on the aspect of love.

Should ruse fail, he would use force, and force would have so much the more chance of success, because for so much the longer time, and with ever-increasing craftiness, ruse would have emasculated the vital strength of France.

He would refrain, therefore, from hurling masses of men, planes and artillery against the soil of France. That should be done later, if necessity decreed it.

The war with France was to have, at first, as its theatre the moral chessboard of the French people, the French army, the French political world, the French working class, and the French aristocracy and *bourgeoisie*.

If the soul of France resisted, she would be triumphant. If it were sapped . . . ?

## Chapter X

### The Fifth Column at Work

MARSHAL GOERING MAKES ADVANCES TO FRANCE—FIRST ALLUSION TO THE NEED FOR A DECLARATION SPECIFYING THAT FRANCE AND ENGLAND CANNOT NEGOTIATE A SEPARATE PEACE—COMMUNiqué OF THE FIRST SUPREME WAR COUNCIL—FIFTH COLUMN ANTI-BRITISH PROPAGANDA—THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMISSIONS OF THE SENATE AND CHAMBER AS CENTRES OF INTRIGUE—M. PIERRE LAVAL GETS READY—M. HENRY BÉRENGER—M. MISTLER—M. P. E. FLANDIN—M. BERGERY—M. PIÉTRI—M. MALVY—M. MONTIGNY—ANATOLE DE MONZIE—PEACE OFFENSIVE OF THE REICH AND THE U.S.S.R.—A SAYING OF M. DE BRINON—CAMILLE CHAUTEMPS—MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S AND M. DALADIER'S REPLIES TO HITLER—THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION—M. FROSSARD'S CANDIDATURE—IN THE PRESS—A PLOT AGAINST M. DALADIER—MUTUAL ANTIPATHY OF M. DALADIER AND M. REYNAUD—CONVERSATIONS WITH M. PAUL REYNAUD

At the time when he ceased to be Minister for Foreign Affairs and had to resign himself to being only Minister of Justice, M. Georges Bonnet asked one of my friends whether he had read my most recent articles.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And what do you think of them?"

"That they show the purest national orthodoxy!"

"Indeed? While closing every door to negotiation?"

"No negotiation is possible."

"I am not of your opinion."



I quote this dialogue, not because it concerns myself, nor to hold it up as a grievance against M. Georges Bonnet, who was only being true to the course he had chosen, and who would consider it, moreover, a useful compliment at the present time. I quote it as a revealing indication of the internal movement which would canker political France and lead her to Bordeaux.

For the sake of greater clearness, I must recall what gave rise to this conversation. On September 9th, Marshal Goering had made a speech which I had denounced as the first step in a diplomatic operation of wide scope. While declaring himself ready for a war of extermination, and renewing on his own account the "*Gott Strafe England*" of William II, he had uttered with regard to France enticing words which looked like olive branches. However ridiculous Marshal Goering might appear in the guise of a dove of peace, the manœuvre had struck me as dangerous and I had written as follows :

*"Herr von Ribbentrop, who doubtless inspired Marshal Goering on this occasion, is, perhaps, counting on the complicity of politicians whose remarks are sometimes imprudent. Once again he is making a mistake. It is one thing to imagine all possible devices for settlement and peace, when the dice are not yet thrown. It is quite another matter, when the sword has weighed down one scale of the balance, to further manœuvres which border on treachery."*

Then, to put a stop to any cunning trick, I had urged that the French and British Governments should : "*Sign as soon as possible an agreement not, under any circumstances, to be a party to a separate peace.*"

These lines appeared in the *Petit Parisien* of September 11th, and there are none of which I am more proud. The declaration I called for, having in mind the one which, in the previous war, had been signed by M. Delcassé for France and by Sir Edward Grey for Great Britain, was initialled some months later in London. It would have saved France from the worst catastrophe, and Great

Britain from an increase of peril if, at the wheel of the French ship of State, there had been as pilot on June 16th 1940, a *Man* instead of a bundle of shattered nerves.

But it is not yet the moment to write the history of that solemn pledge. We have only got as far as Marshal Goering's speech, the first episode in the war of a special kind that Hitler was conducting on the moral chess-board.

Let us remember what General Debeney and General Buhrer told us about the essential task: "*To maintain the morale of the Army and the Country.*" It was at the destruction of this morale that the "war of rot" would aim.

As early as September 13th a reply was made to Goering's speech by the first Supreme Council. Mr. Chamberlain, attended by Lord Chatfield, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, and M. Daladier, accompanied by General Gamelin, expressed in the final common identity of their deliberations: "*the firm resolution of France and Great Britain to devote all their strength and all their resources to facing the conflict which had been imposed upon them.*"

But a communiqué was not sufficient to put the fifth column to flight.

For a long time past the fifth column had been firmly entrenching itself in France. If the transition from peace to war endangered some of its positions, others, solid and concealed, remained which it would utilise to the best advantage.

Let there be no mistake. I do not mean to say that all the individuals who were going to act in the same direction of masked defeatism were under the control of the German agents. If that were so, they would have been quickly exposed. The traitors did not show themselves, they worked in the deepest shadow, so that the eye of justice should not surprise them. From afar they pulled the strings of puppets, some of whom did not even suspect it, while others, being aware, feigned ignorance. There was no talk as yet of a sect whose adherents were

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

actually united by no contract or statute, but by a truly mystical bond. One common thought possessed them: "*The Christian regeneration of an impious France.*"

This purpose involved the destruction of the existing political régime, and to attain it any means would be justified, whatever they might be. Even defeat? Yes. Without defeat could the goal be reached? Among the men drawn from different sections of French society who discussed this central idea in intimate meetings, mention was made of a financier, but neither they nor he yet made themselves known.

As for the politicians, there was scarcely need to stimulate their ambitions, all that was required was to exploit their blunders, imprudences, indiscretions and aberrations.

Among the public, the fifth column and those gravitating about it would foster doubts about the reasons and responsibilities for the war. Why were we at war? For Dantzic? France would not fight for Dantzic, M. Déat had already remarked, the same Déat who, Air Minister at the time, had said on March 7th, 1936: "*We will not fight for Locarno and for the demilitarisation of the Rhineland.*"

Fight for the English? That would be the theme repeated on a thousand lips by poisoned tongues in town and country, in the army, on the wireless, and in the Parliamentary lobbies as well. Why should we? The Germans wish only well to honest Frenchmen, whom they esteem. They ask nothing better than to love them, to take them in their arms. Care was taken not to add that it would only be to suffocate them.

The propaganda was incessant. It assumed a Communist form in working-class circles. It made use of talk about social defence among the *bourgeoisie*. It appealed everywhere to the instinct of personal preservation. It had recourse to all arguments; it was by turns sentimental, aggressive and threatening. The Government was aware of it. M. Daladier condemned it publicly. He issued a

decree against the Communist party, whose deputies were later expelled from Parliament.

The hunt for suspects soon began, but it was too often to stop short at the door of certain *salons*, in the ante-room of certain Ministries, and outside certain centres of intrigue. There was not one and the same doctrine and method from top to bottom of the Governmental ladder. M. Albert Sarraut, Minister of the Interior, is frenziedly energetic in speech and would be in action too, perhaps, if he acted. But he left the business of translating words into actions to the administration, which often went about it in leisurely fashion, and the translation was not faithful to the idea behind the original. Whilst the Prefecture of Police was firmly directed by its Prefect, the *Sûreté* shilly-shallied, saying, by way of excuse, that it was overwhelmed with recommendations, the most imperative of which came from certain Ministers themselves.

As for the politicians, there were some who felt themselves referred to and sat with lowered heads when they heard M. Daladier warn public opinion that: "Germany was looking everywhere for Seyss-Inquarts to betray their country," and that: "She hoped to find Hachas to sign the downfall and consecrate the slavery of it."

But these politicians did not, for that, abandon their alarmist attitudes, which often blended with the normal exercise of Parliamentary control, and sometimes had their origin in naïvety.

That reminds me of the encounter I had one afternoon in September, 1939, in the courtyard of the War Ministry with a worthy Breton Senator, who rushed up to me, his arms raised to heaven.

"Have you heard the news? The Council of Ministers——"

"Well?"

"It's terrible! Haven't you read about it? The Council has pledged itself to pursue the conduct of the war until final victory . . ."

"And it has reaffirmed the ever-closer solidarity of Great Britain and France in this design," I concluded for him. "Would you like the Council to declare itself ready to capitulate?"

"No. But all the same it's grave!" And as he made his way towards the street, he repeated: "It's grave, very grave!"

The Foreign Affairs Commissions of the Chamber and Senate were the geometrical point in which, alongside the legitimate curiosity of the representatives of the nation, there were concentrated the intrigues of impatient ambitions, and the well or ill-intentioned schemings of the "peace-at-any-price" set.

I say "well or ill-intentioned," for among the men who, not without a certain courage, showed themselves prominent, there were some who were not necessarily influenced by cardiac weakness or personal consideration. There were even some cases in which it is very difficult to disentangle the reasons for the attitude adopted.

The Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate, together with the Finance Commission of the same Assembly, formed a veritable fortress inside which the politicians, grown grey in service—ex-Ministers, ex-Premiers, heroes of six-and-thirty Parliamentary battles—lay in waiting for the blunders of their successors, greasing their weapons and training their heavy guns in expectation of the offensive for which one must always be ready.

It was here that M. Pierre Laval had come to establish his winter quarters when political fortune turned away her favours from him.

Patient, supremely patient, he had not, so to speak, shown so much as the tip of his nose for years; but he had not gone to sleep. Day after day he had laid siege first to one, then to another; now he was ready to enter the lists again.

He prepared the atmosphere, he piled up indictments against those who had succeeded him, including the ones

still in office, until the moment seemed to him propitious for a murderous *coup de Jarnac*. He is worthy to be the subject of a special study all to himself.

It was M. Henry Bérenger who presided over the External Affairs Commission of the Senate. In the Upper House he represented the Colony of Guadeloupe, of which, by the way, he is not a native, having been born in Normandy.

He had had an eventful career without contriving to get out of the second and third ranks, even though his capacity for work, his gifts as a writer and his adaptability had seemed to promise him success. Perhaps it was by bad luck that he never inspired confidence in men of the first rank who might have helped him to rise to the most important positions. For some reason, no one ever knew exactly why, they always put him on one side.

He had to his credit a real success in the agreements he concluded with the United States over the war debts. Far from being grateful to him for it, people considered what he had done a crime. It was by chance, thanks to an unforeseen vacancy, that he slipped into the Presidential Chair of the External Affairs Commission of the Senate. Old senatorial traditions assured permanence in office to the person elected to the Presidency of one of these commissions. He took advantage of it and kept himself usually in a wan shadowiness which he seemed to relish. You had to be on very intimate terms with him to know the trend of his thoughts. Not until a late stage did he show his hand in a gesture which served M. Paul Reynaud as a pretext for bringing about the final departure of M. Daladier.

The President of the Commission for External Affairs of the Chamber was a young Radical-Socialist deputy, who hankered after the Ministry of Information, so constantly announced and so long delayed. He had a degree of talent, could compose a good speech and draw up an excellent report. He had some knowledge of many subjects and, all things considered, was above the average

standard of his colleagues, which, it is true, was mediocre enough. At the head of an important Commission like that of Foreign Affairs he could be inconvenient and dangerous, for he knew very well how to detail a questionnaire as truly insidious as it appeared innocent.

Among the members of the Commission was one who stood out by his quality, M. Flandin. That he suffered at not exercising his talents in a rôle suited to his measure is beyond doubt. At the beginning of the war his position was not very clear. He was the object of recurrent little incidents ; of these the unexpected outburst of M. Louis Marin, the President of the Republican Federation, created most stir. During a small meeting of the Presidents of Groups, M. Flandin expressed an opinion which appeared suspect to M. Marin. The latter lost his temper, and without further explanation called M. Flandin to account.

"Be quiet," he flashed out. "The man who sent a telegram of congratulations to Hitler has no right to give lessons to anybody." In gossip about the House that was the sole topic for half a day.

Affected by this rebuff, M. Flandin said to his friends : "I do not feel at home in this war." He wanted to go away, a very long way off to some Embassy in the Far East, or as Governor of a Colony, pending the time when statesmen should wish to avail themselves of his worth. At other moments the professional taste of the politician for the direction of affairs took hold of him again, and he let fall solidly constructed criticisms against one inadequacy or another in the actions of the Government. When it looked as though he were about to attack the Government, the coalition ranged itself behind him, ready to profit by the opportunity. If the opportunity slipped by, the coalition dissolved, leaving M. Flandin, in no way surprised by its dispersal, alone. Far below him M. Bergery showed himself a regular handful.

He was on the fringe of the parties, belonging to none. It was he who had launched the idea of the "Popular

Front " in 1935, and he was the only one not to have benefited by it. He directed an unimportant weekly paper, *La Flèche*. In the Chamber, whether in the public sittings or in those of the Commissions, relish was shown for the pungency of his words and for the originality of an argument, the faultless construction and fragility of which he seemed to delight in revealing simultaneously. It was well known that he took pleasure in appearing to be right while actually being wrong, and he joyfully indulged in it. He was greatly content if he heard people say: "What a sophist!" for it is not everyone who wishes that can be a sophist! He loved to amaze, even to dumbfound.

Only once in my life have I had the opportunity to get near him and study him for any length of time. That was in 1924 when he was Principal Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs under M. Herriot. I had been curious to know him, and I dare say he had the same feeling about me. We were lunching with a third party, my colleague, A. Jullien, who is now dead. Bergery had a distinguished air, and liked to pass for a dandy. During the conversation we chanced to touch on the question of the Soviets. Looking at me hard, perhaps to see how I was going to react, he flung this remark at me: "I shouldn't be sorry if we had a little Bolshevik experiment for a week, just to see. Don't you think it would be amusing?"

I am not easily disconcerted. In answer I said exactly what I thought: "Good heavens, no! What I know of it gives me no desire to make the trial!"

And we all three laughed.

M. Bergery has the courage of the man who loves to challenge, and if the day should come for him to decide on the venture of forming a personal party, perhaps he would face up to any end and means. But, in his case, is it not congenitally impossible for him, short of compulsion from men or circumstances, to resolve on anything more than a mere sketch of a party?



## 118 Truth on the Tragedy of France

Bestirring themselves on the outskirts of the Commission were other men, veterans of the Parliamentary lobbies. I have already mentioned M. Piétri. His is an extremely curious case. He is very intelligent, shrewd, thoroughbred, eloquent, fitted for any position and sure to fill it well, liked by almost everyone because he is affable and knows how to please. Situated politically in the Centre, equidistant from the Right and the Left, an ex-Inspector of Finances, he was an admirable functionary. He was a competent Minister of Finance, a good Minister of Marine, he had dreams of being President of the Republic, and it would have been said at the time that Marianne\* had found herself a fine Athenian.

If with all these qualities he had been a man of character, he would have achieved a great career, but his will was exhausted when he had used it for a certain number of hours in demonstrating that he would be an excellent Ambassador in this or that capital, or a first-rate occupant of that or another seat in the Cabinet. He was, moreover, extremely dangerous to Governments of which he was not a member, for his intrigues were keen and he distilled them with art. Very widely known in Parisian society, he spread about, rather in a detached or confidential tone than with asperity, remarks which would perhaps have brought him before an examining magistrate had Clemenceau suddenly come to life again to be head of the Government once more. It is true that if this dream had come true, M. Piétri would not have been a defeatist : he has too much political sense. It is even debatable whether his defeatism was not rather an attitude of opposition than a real conviction. One day he was so chagrined at not being chosen for a place in the Cabinet which had fallen vacant, that he went to make reproachful and bitter complaints to the Prime Minister. The latter

\* This name for the French Republic dates from about 1849. It is affectionately ironical, and represents the democratic and social republic.—*Translator's Note.*

replied that his reputation was against him. He had said this and that, written this and that. Piétri did not deny it, he is a fencer who admires thrusts delivered according to the rules of the art. But he affirmed that he had also said and written the opposite—which was true!—and that he felt within him the soul of a diehard!

In order to omit no relevant information I mention M. Malvy, who had at one time his moments of celebrity and Parliamentary power, but who is now no more than a supporter of M. Georges Bonnet. Incidentally, M. Malvy knows the ropes thoroughly, and is more adept than anyone else at pleading on behalf of someone while attacking him skilfully, and better still at ruining a man while appearing to defend him. Accused by Clemenceau, he was condemned to banishment and exiled during the last war, to be rehabilitated after the victory.

Is it worth while to draw, from the oblivion in which it appears to have fallen, so obscure a silhouette as that of M. Montigny, deputy for the Sarthe? He made his start in the party of M. Caillaux, whom he abandoned, only to approach him again later. After belonging to the Radical-Socialist group, he broke away from it. He was not gifted enough to play anything more than general utility parts, although he had a certain courage, showing itself in his always being ready to bear the risk and burden of small undistinguished tasks, to which M. de Kérillis, in his vituperations against defeatist schemes, attached perhaps too much importance. I speak of M. Montigny with sympathy, despite my little liking for his shifty eye and muddy complexion, which would have done credit to a stage traitor slinking along the walls, because he was one day the means of giving me a very great pleasure. He was coming to bring M. Bonnet, Minister for Foreign Affairs, a bad report against an official of the Quai d'Orsay, who had been denounced as a votary of *warmongering*. "Warmongering," for those who were accused of it, was the equivalent of "national dignity." I was in the ante-

room. One of the deputies with him came up to me. M. Montigny called him, and I knew that he had recommended him to say nothing to me of the object of the delegation, organised and arranged with the connivance of the Minister. His lack of confidence in me was well worth a word of thanks. Now I have said it.

"And M. Scapini?" perhaps someone will say. M. Scapini was blinded in the last war. A past in which he behaved like a hero forbids me from seeking how he allowed himself to sink to the company of the most suspect defeatists.

It is not, I think, irrelevant to mention here a person, of whom one of the principal men in the country said one day, by way of warning to the Government leaders, that he was at the centre of all the intrigues, even when they were contradictory. Perhaps that was to ascribe too much to him, but Anatole de Monzie was quite capable of it.

By his aristocratic origin Anatole de Monzie might have belonged to the Right. He has always been on the Left. He began as one of the "collectivist students" during the heroic epoch of the beginning of French Socialism, but he is of too independent a fancy to settle down in a party with rigid rules. He was a member of a group known as the Independent Socialists, who take their place at the intersection of M. Daladier's Radical-Socialist and M. Blum's Socialist party, the peculiarity of this group being that there is almost no solidarity of doctrine and discipline among its members. It would be a fine sight to see Anatole de Monzie disciplining himself!

He is the man who at one and the same time launched a campaign, as dashing as it was passionate, to make France go to Canossa, in other words, to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and to recognise the Soviets without delay. It might well be said of him that he lunched with Rakowsky and dined with the Papal Nuncio!

What an extraordinary man he is! Attracting and

dumbfounding you, as witty as the devil, as courageous against you as on your behalf, touchy in friendship, just as capable of devotion as of injustice, intelligent in every respect, ambitious, yet when in office only interested in changing to another, failing to attain the highest, which he coveted, because with his impetuosity, his prejudices, and his leaning towards the unusual it was feared that, installed at the top of the tree, he might prove dangerous, if not catastrophic!

If he was unjust—and how unjust he was!—towards many men who did not deserve to be the objects of his ardent campaigns of disparagement, there was also injustice towards him. When people desired to injure him they repeated a cruel retort made by Poincaré one day when he was out of temper and stung by an irony which had bitten deep.

“Whenever we come across you it is to find you pleading against the interests of France,” he told him.

That was not true. Anatole de Monzie is a patriot, but his unfettered spirit has all the prejudices of the two or three opinions he fixed in his head one day for good and all, and through which he sifts all other matters.

That is why, having conceived a violent hatred of M. Benès, he would himself, for the mere pleasure of doing it, have torn Czecho-Slovakia to pieces. In the same way, having for Italy the weakness of a man of the Renaissance, for such he is with all the contrasts involved, having for Signor Mussolini the admiration which he vowed him when he gave him a place in his celebrated book, *Destins hors Série* he almost always subjected to these two criteria, which are really one, his judgments on politicians and the choice of the position he should take up on international questions.

Who, therefore, should reproach him for having tried to detach Signor Mussolini from the Axis, even though he was ready to pay too high a price? But his error lay in subordinating everything to this purpose. He can only

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

see the thing he prizes, and refuses to see things whole. Finally—and this is more serious—his critical faculty, which is formidably acute, is banished as though by enchantment the moment Italy and Signor Mussolini are involved.

When Mussolini's proposal for a conference was submitted to the Council of Ministers on September 1st, he was among those, for he was a Minister at the time, who considered it sacrilege to suspect any trap in it. So it is that the most subtle, most sceptical, even the most cynical beings, sometimes disclose in themselves absolute depths of guilelessness.

At the end of the first month of war the political atmosphere was undeniably overcharged with noxious miasmas. The Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber had sent M. Daladier a questionnaire in which, plain to see, barely disguised, the whole web of defeatist propaganda could be discerned beneath the questions put. Such uneasiness prevailed in the lobbies of the Chamber and the Senate that wind of it reached the Embassies, from which explanatory telegrams were sent to the Foreign Governments. One of them contained the charming expression: "It is ripe!" The British Ambassador, then Sir Eric Phipps, did not attach particular importance to all this, knowing how these rumours bubble up in French political crises. But, if only from professional duty, he made inquiries and was reassured.

It was at this moment that there took place the "peace offensive" launched by a joint declaration of the Reich and the Soviet Union. At once the little manœuvre of the Commission was lost in the bigger one of Ribbentrop and Molotov. There was an instant of confusion in what are known as official circles. Georges Bonnet is supposed to have said: "We must accept the German proposals."

Thence it was deduced that there was wrangling in the nooks and corners of the Ministries. Messrs. Chautemps,

Pomaret and de Monzie were mentioned as sharing the opinion of the former Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The case of M. Pomaret admits of no doubt. To him was ascribed—and he certainly loved to repeat it—a sentence which expressed very plainly what he wanted to make clear about his external policy: "I would sooner be kicked somewhere than get a bullet in my head."

Judging him only by his physical appearance, it would be difficult to credit him with such concern for his personal preservation. Well-set-up, broad-chested, bold of feature and loud of speech, he certainly looked more cut out for quarrelling than for flight. But as clothes do not make the man, so the aspect does not make the heart. It's almost a pity. M. Pomaret—another Independent Socialist—had done quite well as Minister of Labour. He has wit, though with a trace of vulgarity. He is intelligent, and knows how to work. But, in addition to valour, he lacks that elusive something which makes the gentleman. It is true that, if he were a gentleman, he would be brave, and even if he had only a little courage, he would be ashamed of not having enough.

It is confidently asserted that he was on the best of terms with men like Ribbentrop and Abetz—nothing compromising about it, of course!—only because he felt himself at home with them. No doubt he had been seduced by the charm found in them by my colleague, the Marquess de Brinon, who said to one of his friends in his drawling voice: "My dear fellow, they're too strong: we must come to an understanding with them."

As for M. Camille Chautemps, the Vice-Premier, whom we shall find again in graver situations, he remained true to his chosen rôle. We saw him escape from power on the eve of the *Anschluss*. At the beginning of the war he thought that there might be a hole in the Franco-Polish Treaty through which it might be possible to wriggle out of it. In the Russo-German peace offensive he saw a chance of evasion and would go on seeing it.

As regards M. de Monzie, it is only half true. He wanted to see clearly before pronouncing one way or the other. Faithful to his conception, "seeing clearly" meant for him knowing how the wind was blowing in Rome. But contrary to the impression of the foreign diplomat who cabled that the fruit was ready to fall from the branch, it was not ripe.

To prevent the public from going astray, M. Daladier had a communiqué issued which confined itself to recalling that: "France and England have entered the war to prevent the realisation of the German dream of hegemony. They are fighting for their security and for the security of all civilised States which the German will to dominate threatens with varying degrees of urgency."

The reception accorded to this note by opinion at large did much to clear the sky. The reply made to the Russo-German manifesto by Mr. Chamberlain in the Commons drove the last clouds away. Another speech by Hitler altered nothing, and could alter nothing. How much belief could the most credulous of men attach to the indignant protests of the Führer when he cried emphatically: "I defy anyone to reproach me with the charge of having broken my word."

The shameless lies and broken pledges were still too fresh in the most forgetful memories. And if he held out his hand to us, as he proclaimed, one had only to answer, as I did in the name of many Frenchmen: "Has he looked at the hand he is offering us? For those who are not wilfully blind it is still warm with the blood of the martyrs of Warsaw."

"We are at war," M. Daladier would make solemn reply, but those four words, which after twenty-three years echoed the famous apostrophe of Clemenceau: "I wage war, I wage war!" would have done more to cleanse the atmosphere than the longest of speeches, had there not been on the part of some a pre-determination to disturb it. Because Mr. Chamberlain had frankly

admitted that he would not systematically lay possible proposals aside without reading them, because M. Daladier in his broadcast reply had adopted a grave and subdued tone, there were people, such as M. Pierre Dupuy, Deputy for the French Indies and director of the *Petit Parisien*, who wanted to draw attention to a possible hesitation, to discover in the speeches an opening for manœuvre, and who refused to see in it the controlled energy of a man conscious of his heavy responsibilities.

Let us not forget that M. Daladier was at the very centre of all the difficulties. As Minister for Foreign Affairs he was at grips with the ever-more complicated problems of external policy: Italy to keep an eye on, and to forestall if it proved impossible to win her over; Turkey, with which negotiations were in progress; Roumania, which was vacillating; Spain to be brought closer, or at least kept in bounds; Belgium and Holland, both the object of German designs; the Scandinavians, who would have to make their choice sooner or later; the Russian bear, who was stretching out his great paws over the Baltic countries, and who was getting ready to take little Finland by the throat; Japan which, profiting by the difficulties in Europe, was pushing forward in China, harassing the British in Shanghai, Tientsin and Hong Kong, besides casting covetous glances on Indo-China.

As Minister of National Defence and of War, he had, as we have already seen in an earlier chapter, to cope with all the defects in the military organisation which sometimes drew cries of anger from him; and even so there were a great number that were hidden from him.

One mighty problem harassed the Government leaders on many grounds, that of propaganda, in which the Opposition, not all to be identified with the defeatist clique, had found a war horse which galloped apace.

As Chief Commissary at the Ministry of Information there was a more than distinguished mind, a writer of quality, a novelist of fine perception, an original dramatist



—all of which combined in one individual did not suffice to make "the right man in the right place," the more so because he was neither a Member of Parliament nor particularly combative, while, as a speaker, when he stood before the microphone he was, thanks to his ethical language and fine shades of meaning, at least a rung above the mass of his hearers.

Behind him all the old "leave-it-to-someone-else" gang of diplomacy took cover. Under his authority, without his concerning himself overmuch with them, were placed the censorship services. However well the censorship acted, it could not but arouse immense dissatisfaction. Now, it was in vain that its direct head, M. Martineau-Deplas, did his best, he could not succeed in squaring the circle and reconcile constantly increasing claims from the Ministries to tolerate no criticism with the protests of a press against what they considered persecution and abuse of power.

M. Daladier promised to appoint a Minister of Propaganda, thereby raising hopes in the breast of every Member of Parliament. But it is one thing to promise and another to fulfil. Who was he to choose? M. Mistler, as we have already shown, solicited the position. M. Daladier did not refuse him. M. Frossard was officially a candidate. His daily article in a political journal was a demonstration of what the Ministry of Information did not do and of what it ought to do. When addressed on the subject of M. Frossard, M. Daladier retorted: "Do you want him to betray me a second time!"

M. Daladier had not forgotten that when, in September, 1938, he dealt the first blow at the forty-hour week legislation in order to stimulate the manufacture of arms, M. Frossard would have set him tottering by resigning his position as Minister of Public Works, if he had not shown sufficient quickness of decision to replace him without ceremony. M. Daladier does not forget little things like that which M. Frossard, for his part, would be glad to

forget. He would have too many to remember! Has not his whole political career been made up of fluctuations?

Sprung from the ranks of the schoolmasters, he began his political life as a Socialist, became one of the first French Communists following a pilgrimage to the Mecca of Moscow, then returned to the Socialist party, on the outskirts of which he remained in accordance with the pleasing formula of "time-bider" until the moment when his "friend Laval" made him Minister of Labour. Having in his turn found refuge among the Independent Socialists, he set no limits to his ambition, which led him sometimes a trifle beyond the accepted rules of the game. He was among those who laid stress on the Communist danger, and was consequently accused of wanting to mask the German peril. He defended himself against the charge so ably that only deliberate ill-will could question his sincerity. Not until Tours and Bordeaux would people finally discover just how much his courage and firmness of conviction were worth.

M. Daladier reviewed the ranks of the politicians. For the task under consideration, as for many others, the dearth of men of worth and character was depressing. He decided to gain time. He was not, besides, without other worries occasioned by the swirl of internal politics.

Information poured into him from the Chamber, the Senate, the Embassies, from politicians—even Ministers talked too freely—from the editorial offices of certain newspapers, where influences of various kinds were at work in favour of a bloodless peace, from the Ministry of the Interior and the Prefecture of Police, where unambiguous reports drew attention to the fact that such and such a person had met a certain other person, and that they had concerned themselves far more with bringing about the fall of the Government than with consolidating it.

On the biggest evening paper, a journal with a European reputation, the two directors did not disguise their joint preference for the abandonment of the struggle. M.

Chastenet had been one of the first, a good many years ago now, to go and hear, listen to and admire Hitler. He brought back to the Quai d'Orsay a memorandum which caused smiles at the ingenuousness it betrayed. He had remained the man of that memorandum, and used to say sometimes: "If only they had listened to me."

His colleague, M. Mireaux, a Senator of recent election, had walked about since the beginning of hostilities with a face as scared as the utterances with which he justified it. Anybody unlucky enough to sit next or opposite to him for an evening at table was ill with pessimism for the night. He has been rewarded, and is no longer afraid. For some weeks he was a Minister in the Pétain Government, charged with restoring morale in French education, then he fell back into the obscurity from which he ought never to have emerged.

I am anxious to point out, in parenthesis, that I am not establishing any kind of connection between the tendencies of these gentlemen and the actions which caused one of their editors to be arrested and sentenced.

The *Matin* has always been a centre of anti-British feeling. It is a question of precedence between M. Bruneau Varilla and John Bull. M. Bruneau Varilla is one of those men who establish their dominance by the fear they like to inspire. For the best part of half a century, with a mere frown he has made Premiers and Ministers tremble, so that at the first whistle they spring to attention. What has occurred between John Bull and him? All we know is that M. Bruneau Varilla has sworn death to the British Empire. Consequently he is pro-German. Formerly he made alliance with William II. He has now made friends with Hitler.

In 1933, while I was publishing in the *Petit Parisien* the German documents in which Doctor Goebbels disclosed, for the benefit of his agents in South America, the objects of his propaganda, and announced in advance a little game of the type we have since witnessed, it was

for the *Matin* that M. de Brinon's interview with Hitler was reserved; that was the first blow directed against French anti-German feeling.

M. de Brinon, whose name I have mentioned, was a distinguished journalist. He had entered into friendly relations with Herr von Ribbentrop, and took it upon himself to introduce him into Parisian circles, where he had many ties. The day after the publication of the Goebbels documents to which I have referred, he wanted, without my knowledge, to arrange a meeting between Herr von Ribbentrop and M. Pierre Dupuy, Director General of the *Petit Parisien*. It was not with any good intention towards me, even if it was with regard to Herr von Ribbentrop. I told M. Pierre Dupuy, who warned me of it, that it was a disgrace, and I believe that the meeting did not take place.

M. de Brinon had formed a France-Germany Committee intended to make the Germans beloved of the French. It was a very miscellaneous hotbed of political demoralisation. At the outbreak of war the France-Germany Committee went to sleep. M. de Brinon departed to his estates, where he awaited the glory of revenge. It has arrived, and he has become a hyphen between Ribbentrop, Abetz and M. Pierre Laval. Here he is, now the ambassador for the policy of Franco-German collaboration, with his Hitlerian friends. He is proud and happy, but is not assured that it will last. This day of revenge was also to dawn for the *Matin* which, after June 16th, would be able to revert to its anti-British passion. This privilege thus acquired will, I hope, prove painful for it.

On the staff of the *Petit Parisien* there was one man, its editor, who personified the struggle against Germany, the battle against Hitlerism, and staunch alliance with England. But he was alone, or almost alone. How was he to be struck down? Attempts were made, but they were not to succeed. It would take the collapse at Bordeaux to get the better of him.

Then the *Petit Parisien* would venture to blossom out into the defeatism in which, personally, M. Pierre Dupuy delighted, but without daring to advertise it, and above all without daring, save by feeble, quickly repelled insinuations, to ask me—for it is of myself that I am compelled to speak—to modify the intransigence of our position. I should not have allowed myself this public reference to a man who, to silence me, had, after all, yielded neither to his nature nor to any pressure, had he not, under his own signature, lost all dignity in repudiating in the *Petit Parisien* the policy which was mine but which his silence had made his, and in lying down before the conqueror.

But we have a long way to go before we reach that point. Let us return to the intrigues of the winter of 1939.

All and sundry about the lobbies of the Senate were told that a scheme was being prepared under the ægis of Marshal Pétain, who was supposed to have asked his faithful Lemery, Senator of Martinique (who was also one of the most devoted agents of Pierre Laval), whether *it was the moment to come*.

This news got as far as London, where, with all the known details, true and false, it was going to be disclosed in a daily paper, but a timely intervention prevented its publication. "Perhaps," exclaimed M. Daladier, "it would have been better to let it appear in print. That would have burst the abscess."

The scheme was concerned with the setting up of a Chautemps Ministry with, as its programme, immediate peace. Naturally, Pétain was in it. The truth is that there were two parallel plots, one in which the Marshal was only what, as we have already indicated, an evil fate destined him to be at the end of his life, namely, a *cover*. In the other the Marshal assumed the first place, and behind him there sheltered a team of which M. Laval was front rank man. But contrary to the expectations of the conspirators, this time the Marshal had not allowed himself

to be imposed upon. At this period, he was still clear-headed enough to realise that he was being asked to bear loads too heavy for his weary shoulders.

"My modest ambition," he replied, "is only to hold a position equivalent to that of Major-General, so that I can inspect the armies and say a cheering word to the troops." This mission he would assuredly have fulfilled with unquestionable authority. All the same, he wondered whether it was not his duty to come back to Paris. But from the Ministry came the request that he should stay in Madrid on account of the ceremonies announced to take place there, and at which the prestige of his presence appeared useful.

In the mass of truth, and fragments of truth, which reached the Premier in more or less distorted form, there were often bits of tittle-tattle and lies, such as the ones which made M. Mandel out as a partner in a plot ascribed by the same sources to M. Reynaud. I had the opportunity at that time of informing M. Mandel of the imputations against him carefully brought to M. Daladier's notice. Both men knew that I was the friend of each of them separately, and that my intervention had no other object than their common good, and especially the welfare of my country.

M. Mandel at once had an immediate explanation with M. Daladier. I do not know if some disastrous malevolence did not prevent M. Daladier from wholly believing my assurances, but I should be greatly surprised if, in his reflections to-day, he does not regret not having entered into wholehearted partnership with his Minister for the Colonies. Events would certainly have taken a different turn both for them and for our own country.

I can say almost the same of M. Reynaud. If it had been possible to make a cocktail of the respective gifts of M. Edouard Daladier, M. Paul Reynaud and M. Georges Mandel, what good fortune it would have been for France! She would have had almost a superman at her head.

Unhappily, as we have just noted, M. Daladier still nourished a slight mistrust of M. Mandel, which, however, was weakening, and would have been overcome if the fates had allowed enough time.

As for Daladier and Reynaud, I speedily lost the fugitive hope that it might be possible for them to join in close, sincere and effective alliance. I quickly realised that the two had but one point in common: mutual antipathy, a deep-seated physical and intellectual antipathy, so marked that, when they could possibly avoid it, they never spoke to one another. Each attributed the worst intentions to the other, and one had only to recount to the other the hostile utterances of the other, and reciprocally, to be sure of touching a sensitive spot. While wishing to do exactly the opposite I pressed disastrously upon it in Reynaud's case. M. Daladier was convinced that M. Reynaud was plotting to overthrow him, and M. Reynaud swore that M. Daladier wanted to get rid of him. At the stage I have reached in my narrative, M. Daladier had just been told that M. Reynaud, his Finance Minister, allowed defeatist remarks to be made in his circle, that he was himself contaminated by them, and had a hand in one, indeed, in several, anti-Government plots.

A fortunate chance took me a few days later to M. Paul Reynaud's office and, without wasting time in preliminaries, I said to him in a tone half ironical, half serious: "Well, how far have you got in your plot against the safety of the State?"

He burst out laughing.

"I've had an explanation with 'him.' It's all right."

"They told me, as well, that you were no longer determined to see this business through, and that you were sailing in defeatist waters."

He looked up and replied harshly: "If it's being defeatist to criticise certain governmental methods, I am. No, my dear friend, I'm not a defeatist. On the contrary,

I want us to go all out in this war, to make it in earnest, to devote all our energies to it.

"At the last Cabinet Meeting I asked that the public should be made really 'war conscious,' and that severe restrictions should be put on petrol and foreign tobacco, because the less petrol and foreign tobacco are bought, the more currency and gold there will be for aeroplanes. I was not supported. I was almost alone. Then I said: 'I warn you, if you persist in conducting the war like this, you will lose it.'"

M. Reynaud then worked himself up, and striding round his study, his hands in his pockets and his habitual mannerism of moving his head about, as though to loosen a stiff neck, much in evidence, voiced his ambition in staccato phrases.

"Let them give me the War Ministry. No lead is being given there. Daladier has been deceived by the head men there, and the generals. There is so much to do at the Rue St. Dominique. New blood is needed. Leadership, stimulus, enforcement of discipline—all those are wanted. Without them we shall lose the war. Yes, I would gladly go to the Rue St. Dominique, but *he* would never consent. He'd be afraid that I should make an inventory of errors, neglect, delays, and——"

I threw up my arms and interrupted him.

"It's obvious that, if you ask *him* for the War Ministry in that threatening tone, bluntly, it would hardly be a good beginning to the conversation."

He calmed down, and I took advantage of it to make a suggestion.

"It's fine, it's splendid, what you say. I sincerely believe you, and I've told him several times that he ought to give up the War Ministry and keep only the Foreign Office, where his qualities of balance, waiting, patience, and even mistrust are essential. Perhaps we do need fresh blood at the Rue St. Dominique, and more severity than he possesses. But what you have said to me you must



say to him. It is for you to have a serious conversation with him, in which you will explain yourself thoroughly, give him the impression of real friendliness, and make him understand that it is in his interest as well as yours, and, above all, in the interest of the country, to enter upon a policy of war to the hilt."

M. Reynaud at once protested.

"He is so mistrustful that he's bound to suspect a conspiracy," he said sarcastically.

I nodded, and deliberately put him on his mettle.

"Perhaps. But do you give up so easily, are you the kind of man who cannot make a second attempt? You ought to keep on seeing him and insist. He's a patriot——"

M. Reynaud—I emphasise the point—immediately cut me short.

"Yes, he's a patriot, as I said to one of our mutual friends. It may well be that my face and my turn of mind are not to his liking, but he cannot refuse me the honesty and patriotism that I myself acknowledge in him."

"You should come to an understanding—you must."

M. Reynaud was silent for an instant. He pondered, and then asked deliberately: "Will you help me?"

"I ask nothing better."

"What causes the difficulty between M. Daladier and me is the difference of our political origins. He has reached the top through the party, by slow party operations, whereas I have not been used to these political customs, which, by the way, I neither praise nor condemn. I go straight ahead, and am not on the look out for perfidy; he must suspect it in almost every quarter, because he has come across so much."

M. Reynaud then declared that, politically speaking, nothing could be done against M. Daladier. "Unless," he added in a lower tone, "grievous events occur, not to be desired, which might carry him away with them."

That day I felt hopeful, and I took steps to ensure that M. Daladier should know of the inclination to draw closer

to him that M. Reynaud had shown in my presence. But this inclination was not to be renewed. Antipathetic reflexes proved too strong, and developed into definite hatred aggravated by the incitements of the men and women about them. As for M. Daladier, his distrust of M. Reynaud increased until it grew into a paroxysm.

A tragedy would unfold itself of the like of which, for shame and horror, not even Æschylus or Shakespeare could have an inkling.

## Chapter XI

### M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return

HERR VON RIBBENTROP DECLARES HIS LOVE FOR FRANCE—A CONVERSATION WITH M. PIERRE LAVAL—HE GAMBLES ON MARSHAL PÉTAIN—"A STATUE ON A PEDESTAL"—M. LAVAL'S CAREER—SAVED BY BRIAND—CAILLAUX AND CLEMENCEAU—HIS FOREIGN POLICY

ROUND about October 20th, 1939, Signor Guariglia, the Italian Ambassador to France, who was widely known in Paris society and frequently met politicians more or less well qualified to represent French public opinion, such as Messrs. Bonnet, de Monzie, Caillaux, Piétri and *tutti quanti*—it is only fitting to use the Italian expression—Signor Guariglia, I say, casually let fall, in the presence of someone who kindly made me a present of it, this simple observation: "In Paris there is a very strong tide of opinion in favour of a speedy peace."

This was in the thick of the parallel campaigns in the Parliamentary lobbies and political *salons* when each clan was exploiting the name of Marshal Pétain. Coincidence or not: two or three days later Herr von Ribbentrop, the Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs, pronounced at Dantzig a violent harangue against England, which he ended with a tender homily addressed to the French. No profound reflection was required to penetrate to the core of the operation, but it was difficult to expose it save in an interrogative form.

Whilst he was prodigal of sarcasm against our Allies, why did he throw in our faces the insult of a declaration of love? Why did he assert that the French people were

impatiently awaiting the peace which Hitler would be so willing to bestow upon us as an alms? These were questions which I determined to put in the *Petit Parisien* of October 26th, 1939, accompanying them with commentaries which, to ensure the absolute clarity of this narrative, I must place on record :

*"With what Frenchman therefore," so ran a part of my article, "has he lunched, dined and so forth that he can prejudice such a collapse on the part of the whole of our nation? No! Until further information comes to light I will not insult any of the Frenchmen who have made the mistake of having dealings or friendly relations with him by thinking that they can have caused us to merit this shameful presumption of his on the subject of our people.*

*"Well then, what information can his spies be sending him?*

*"Because there are four schemers who champ their bits in the byways which lead to power and who criticise and make lists with their names in prominent positions, who compromise honourable and glorious names without consent of their bearers and think: 'If I were king . . . !' and who, in order to be so, would gladly play the card of surrender, because of these men do Ribbentrop's agents make him believe that the moment is propitious for a skilful manoeuvre against M. Daladier and against our honour?"*

The decisive response to these "malignant offensives" could only be the "solemn public declaration between France and Great Britain that neither one nor the other would conclude a separate peace," so I insisted once again. I draw attention to this in passing to mark the date. The importance of it will appear later.

I certainly expected that my direct references to the relations of certain Parisians with Herr von Ribbentrop, as well as to the conspiracies in progress, would cause a stir. Some good folk who congratulated me on them would have greatly preferred to cut me to pieces. Others did not disguise their anger, which caused me keen delight.

## 138 Truth on the Tragedy of France

The inquisitive wanted to know at whom I had been aiming. Who were the "four schemers"?

"As there are certainly more than four," I answered, "I wanted to allow all of them to swear that it could not have anything to do with them."

I had wittingly put my finger on a bell-push and I expected my ring to be answered. So I was not surprised when from the other end of the wire I heard: "Is that you, Bois? Pierre Laval here. You're all right?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Quite well. I say——"

"Yes."

"I've read your article of this morning—it upset me a little."

"Why? You can't recognise yourself in it. You're not a defeatist, are you?"

"Certainly not! I believe that war could have been avoided, but now there can be no question of a dishonourable peace."

"I was sure you weren't! Why, I know you even very definitely defended yourself against such a thing. That was a short while ago in the presence of a friend of mine."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, he didn't. But everything gets round, and I know it because you said it yourself."

"I'd like to have a talk with you."

"By all means."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow."

"You see, you alluded to a personality who must not be compromised, as he will be needed—the Man of Madrid."

"Quite so!"

The next morning I was in his little office in the Champs Elysées. At once he set the tone of the conversation.

"So I am not one of the 'four schemers'?" he said with cordial irony.

"You said yourself that you weren't."

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 139

"Who are they?"

"You know the lie of the land too well for me to have to tell you anything."

His face relaxed in that indescribable smile, peculiar to him, in which it is very difficult to discover how much is due to real pleasure and how much to pretended gaiety. Then in a regular monologue, whose originality I cannot reproduce, made up of grimaces, laughter, anecdotes, trenchant words, barbed shafts against some rival, intentional digressions and unexpected twists, M. Laval enlightened me—the word is his—about his position. I will confine myself to giving the gist of his speech which lasted more than an hour.

He began by renewing his declaration of the previous day against any appearance of defeatism. Neither a dishonourable peace nor a premature peace. We were at war. He thought it could have been avoided, not so much at the moment when it broke out as a long time before. The Italian card had not been properly played. He would have known how to do it. Besides, the game was not entirely lost. Contact must be maintained with Mussolini.

"I offered my assistance," he added, "and did not even receive a reply. We must explain to him our war aims and get to know his underlying thoughts."

"I'll tell you," I interrupted. "At the present moment, anything we might try with Mussolini is doomed to failure. What was possible three years ago, and perhaps more recently, is possible no longer. Mussolini will only decide at the eleventh hour according to the chances of victory on the one side or the other. Unfortunately if the Ambassador passes on to Rome all the remarks of his ordinary visitors, I cannot augur anything good from that. They're not of a kind to influence the Duce's affections in our favour. Do you know what the Ambassador's wife said out loud last week in the company of a dozen people? 'France is wrong not to ask for an immediate peace. She

will be beaten.' And, to support her prediction, she invoked the authority of one of the members of the Government."

M. Pierre Laval, laughing derisively, let fall a name and, believing he had guessed right, added triumphantly without waiting for my answer: "It was he, was it? What a simpleton!" After a pause he went on: "I haven't seen the Ambassador for a long while, I must go and see him."

"If it is to assure him that there will be no weakening either on your part or from any other direction, your visit will be useful."

M. Pierre Laval did not hesitate.

"There is nothing else I could tell him, for that is what I think. I ask that the war shall be carried on until victory, but I contend that the goal cannot be reached with the present Government, many of whose members are responsible for the state of disorganisation in which the 'Popular Front' bogged us. I am a member of the Commissions of the Senate and there I have proof of criminal inadequacies of every kind. We must, you understand, form a genuine war Government which will genuinely conduct the war."

"That's what I think, and I haven't waited until to-day to entreat everybody I come across who may be in a position to do it or to help in doing it. I believe that M. Daladier would ask nothing better than to be able to do it."

"No one can do it but a man who stands out above the scrum. I am not, as you might say, very thick with Pétain, but I saw Goering saluting him at Cracow at Pilsudski's funeral. I know his prestige. His name would suffice to rally round him the best and most energetic men. There'd be some glamour about it. That's what upset me about your article, far more than your dig at the 'schemers' "—he stressed the word with a studied grimace, part smile, part look of reproach. "You understand, it

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 141

would be a great pity if he were discredited in advance by being made to appear in the light of a future Premier in a 'peace at any price' Cabinet."

"Agreed," I said. "But he's very old. I saw him in August at the Embassy at San Sebastian where I was his guest at lunch. I watched him, not as a critic, but as an admirer anxious to preserve in his mind the memory of a hero. He's hale and hearty, upright, his voice does not yet waver, but there's something about him which no one who has seen old men drawing to the end of their days can mistake. It's the look of the eyes: that look which wanders away when an effort of will does not keep his attention fixed on the conversation, a look which seems to lose itself in the distance and ends by appearing set and dead. As for his talk, apart from reminiscences well worn by repeated telling, it struck me as colourless, almost empty, reduced to a crystallisation of a few old common-places. The effort of reflection is certainly neither considerable nor productive. That is not perhaps sufficient to direct the conduct of the war!"

Pierre Laval checked my diagnosis with a wave of the hand.

"That doesn't matter. What will be asked of him? To be a statue on a pedestal. His name! His prestige! Nothing more."

At that moment I was certainly not thinking of what happened later on, but I felt like saying to Pierre Laval—and I made a note of it at the same time as of our conversation: "But you talk as if you were sure that Pétain would be entirely in your power, in your sole power, and that no one else would succeed in wresting him from you!"

While this thought, fugitive, like many presentiments, flashed across my mind, M. Pierre Laval continued the development of his plan. He saw in a future more or less distant, but which he was tending by every means, both direct and oblique, to bring nearer, a Pétain Cabinet of which he would have been the instigator, the king-pin, the



producer, and of which he would retain the real direction. But what did he propose to do with M. Daladier ?

"Why shouldn't Daladier," he concluded, after having first heaped abuse on him, "why shouldn't Daladier advance the Marshal's hour? He would then have his place under the ægis of a great soldier. Otherwise the campaign against him will grow more and more vigorous. The knife!" he exclaimed, baring a jaw like a man-eater and making the gesture of plunging a blade into a wounded boar.

"It's not without danger," I objected. "Besides, why should you want to eliminate him? His popularity is an important capital asset."

"It has greatly decreased."

"Don't you believe it!"

"It's still very considerable," interposed a mutual friend who, having arrived a minute or two before, was now joining in the conversation.

It was Jean Chiappe, former Prefect of Police, a Deputy and Municipal Councillor of Paris. Pierre Laval was impressed by this opinion which assumed particular importance from the fact that it was expressed by a man who, since that famous 6th of February, could hardly be suspected of being unduly favourable to Daladier.\*

Jean Chiappe, it is only fair to say, refrained out of pure patriotism from expressing his resentment in public, and his vote had been assured to the Government, especially since the suppression of the Communist party (September 26th, 1939).

There was a brief silence, broken by Laval.

\* During the Stavisky scandal of 1934, which culminated in the riots of February 6th, M. Daladier dismissed M. Chiappe from his position of Prefect of Police, offering to make him Resident-General of Morocco. It was believed that the dismissal was the price demanded by the Socialist party for their support of M. Daladier's Government. But riots caused the fall of the Ministry, and M. Doumergue, an ex-President, was called upon to form a National Government.

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 143

"I am not anxious that he should be eliminated. But the Government, in its present form, cannot last."

In the course of the evening I had to see Jean Chiappe. I had left him with Pierre Laval, who said to him: "I was upset by Bois' article. I know very well that one cannot modify the main lines of his policy, but I was anxious that he should not get any mistaken ideas about my action."

From the words I had just heard I took away several impressions. According to the first, in my view the most important, Pierre Laval, in his customary masterly manner, was manœuvring in every direction in order to put himself in a position to be the *man of the situation*, whatever situation might present itself. Secondly, Pierre Laval would offer no very long resistance, should M. Daladier wish to compromise with him. He would regard it as a gain which should not be allowed to escape him. In the third place M. Daladier would have more than ever to watch over the gain, for M. Laval was not a joustier whose lance could be treated with contempt. For some time past he had been giving proof that he had lost nothing of the art of slipping into oblivion following a political mishap, of lying low and seizing the opportune moment to make an abrupt reappearance like a Jack-in-the-box. Capable of adapting his personal propaganda to all circles in which he had old comrades and people ready to oblige him for services rendered to them during the course of his long career, skilled in using to his purpose the good humour which disarms, the argument *ad hominem* which flatters or interests, and the suggestion which holds promises, no one knew better than he how to give to the different people, separately tackled, with whom he conversed, the impression that they could count on him and that he was in agreement with them.

His range extended from the C.G.T.\* to the extreme Right, from Paul Faure to La Rocque, by way of Fernand

\* General Confederation of Labour.

Bouisson, without counting prominent Radicals like Camille Chautemps, with whom he did not lose contact.

It was in the shadow of the Foreign Affairs Commission\* of the Senate, and in private conversations that, as I have already mentioned, he thus gradually regained the greater part of the ground he had lost at the time of his eclipse towards the end of 1935.

So many events have taken place since then that it may be as well to take a glance back over his career. His face, with its brownish complexion, ebony hair and the sardonic creases that laughter has furrowed in his cheeks, once seen is never forgotten and puts you in mind of some king of a savage tribe. This is no more than an outward appearance for, even supposing that many generations back some Spaniard with Moorish blood in his veins came to found a family in his native Auvergne, he yet has the qualities and defects of his province: tenacious, farsighted, not miserly but thrifty, prone to mistrust which he takes care to disguise but which betrays itself when he looks at you suddenly out of the corner of his eye, resourceful, subtle, cunning as a monkey. The difficulties of an impoverished youth have at the same time made his character supple and his will tough. Laboriously, at the cost of severe privations, he acquired enough learning to become a barrister. He was attracted towards Syndicalist circles, he frequented "advanced" gatherings, he pleaded for Labour Exchanges. Workers who had a bone to pick with justice came to consult him. He defended them in

\* When a Bill is introduced into Parliament in France it is entrusted to the appropriate Commission for consideration or discussion. The Commissions, of which there is one for each Government Department—education, justice, etc., consist of 33 members each (44 for the Finance Commission) drawn from all parties in the House in proportion to the number of seats each party holds. Each Commission is therefore a microcosm of the Chamber or Senate. In practice, it is the Commission rather than the Cabinet Minister concerned that pilots the Bill through its subsequent stages. At least, that is what disgruntled Ministers are apt to feel!

the Courts or before the Conciliation Boards in industrial disputes. That did not bring him in much, often nothing at all, but there was no syndicate or union where he had not at least one friend whom he would find sooner or later at his side when he came to participate in political battles. The clothes he wore, at least as much as the services he rendered so good-temperedly, encouraged familiarity. They were never very elegant, in his early days they were of a simplicity bordering on the untidy, except for the celebrated white piqué tie to which he was to become a slave.

"Then I had but the one," he would say whimsically, "which I washed or got someone to wash for me every evening."

Everyone addressed him without ceremony and he replied in kind. Omitting his surname, they would call him Pierre, or with even more cordiality Pedro. It is with this almost affectionate appellation that later, when they had taken different directions, Léon Blum would greet him as he passed him at an angle of one of the corridors in the Palais Bourbon, if they were not actually in a period of vigorous conflict.

Laval's connections, operations, occupations and all the ambitions which begin to define themselves in him mark him out quite naturally for participation in electoral struggles. He sets his heart on Aubervilliers, one of the most advanced corners of the suburbs of Paris. He is a popular orator. His warm, taking voice can set the sentimental chord vibrating. M. Frossard, who shared in an electoral campaign with him after the Great War, said to me one day: "For more than a fortnight I heard him deliver approximately the same speech every evening on the horrors of war. He spoke of the mothers, the orphans, the wounded. In the hall all his hearers were weeping and I, who knew what he was going to repeat, well, I tell you, I couldn't resist either, I had to take out my handkerchief every time. He can boast of being the man who has drawn the most tears from my eyes."

But he has not only the one string to his bow. He has the comical and ironical as well. He is fond of recalling a typical recollection. At one of his first public meetings in his future constituency one of his hecklers attacked him vehemently. This contradictor had scored such a success that the outlook seemed pretty bad for Pierre Laval, at all events for that evening. He had to make headway against a strong current. From every corner of the hall voices called upon him to reply. He beat about, seeking inspiration as a hunter seeks for game, but the audience became more and more tempestuous.

"Then," he said, "an idea of genius occurred to me, as I saw in the auditorium some honest faces which a sixth sense told me were compatriots. I made as though I were about to admit the accusation. I took my time about recalling my opponent's charges as if seeking an excuse. Then I made up my mind. I had been accused of being a Jew, because my name is also that of a town, as is the case with many Israelites who are called Lisbon, Carcassonne, etc. 'I am going to make a confession,' I said slowly, only to be interrupted by an immense uproar: 'He admits it, he admits it!' I allowed it to die down, then, feeling that I was going to win the day, I went on in a tone of melodramatic melancholy: 'I am compelled to make a confession. A Jew? No, I am no Jew, I am —from *Auvergne*!' I think I brought the word out well, for a storm of laughter shook the room. I joined in it heartily. The next day, the proprietor of the public-house where my rival had his headquarters, came to see me. There was no doubt that he hailed from my province. He was robust, black with coal, hard as our chestnuts, set firmly on his big feet.

"'Are you really from Auvergne?' he asked me suspiciously 'No fooling?'

"'Look,' I said. 'Here's a copy of my birth certificate. I come from Chateldon.'

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 147

“ ‘ Chateldon ! Fouchtra !\* You’ll get in ! ’

“ I did ! ”

Elected ! Elected ! The high road was open to him, but he went along it slowly in the manner of the peasants of his province. It was as well that he did, for having strayed down some suspect paths he might have lost his way before he was in a position to retrace his steps. The war of 1914 broke out. His name was inscribed in the famous *list B*, that is to say the list of people to be kept under supervision in the event of international conflict. He was a deputy. He made no suspicious moves, but he was one of the extreme Left group, known as the “ Kienthalians ” because they had sent a delegation to Kienthal in Switzerland to discuss at an international conference the means of compelling the Governments to make peace without delay.

It was at a moment when war weariness weighed heavily on the morale of the troops and the people. The Chamber met in secret session. Pierre Laval took the plunge. This time his instinct for gauging a situation was at fault. His speech, one of out and out pacifism, fell flat amid general disapproval. At the end of the session when he went out, exhausted, his head bent, he felt himself alone and perhaps finished. A senior statesman, whose star had perhaps long haunted his dreams, saw him, took pity on him and, looking scornfully at his fellow-members who drew away from Laval as though he had just been struck down by the plague, went up to him and took him by the arm.

“ Well, my friend, you’ve made a mistake. It’s a bad moment to get over. You’ll have to live it down and not do it any more. You’ve got talent, you’ll forge ahead again before long.”

They went out together. That day Pierre Laval was

\* *Fouchtra* is the Auvergnats’ usual version of *Fichtre* ! (By Jove !) and is therefore sometimes used as a synonym for a native or for the dialect of Auvergne.

saved by Aristide Briand and a friendship sprang up between the two which would last almost until the death of the Man of Locarno, until the moment when the presence of the half-dying Briand would appear an obstacle to Laval's ambition, which had grown avid and suddenly clumsy.

But he was likewise the friend of Caillaux and Clemenceau. He was faithful to both of them, though that was not easy. But this loyalty saved him from further mistakes of a kind like the Kienthal blunder. He defended Caillaux when he was accused, imprisoned and sentenced at the instigation of Clemenceau, and he helped Clemenceau in Syndicalist circles where he continued to be regarded as a comrade. As a success in contradiction it was great sport. Mandel, the "Grey Eminence," the man at Clemenceau's elbow in politics, also had a hand in it and, as the years went by, the bond uniting them certainly slackened but was never completely cut. Mandel never gave way on the fundamental principles of wholehearted patriotism, but in practice he and Laval would give each other loyal support, either publicly or secretly, according to the circumstances.

I have made a point of thus recalling in broad outline this period of Pierre Laval's life, because the contradictions of earlier years make it easier to understand the contradictions of the present time. As a man, whose name I will not mention for fear of compromising him, put it: "When one has been a Kienthalian something of it always remains." But Pierre Laval was not only a Kienthalian. A quarter of Kienthalism, a quarter each of Clemencism, of Caillautism and of Briandism all enclosed in the brain and body of a man from Auvergne—and there, you might say, you have Pierre Laval. It is probably only in estimating the proportions of each ingredient that you would be liable to err.

The phases of M. Pierre Laval's political life for the past ten years or so are too near to us for me to lay stress on them. No one fails to remember broadly that if he started

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 149

on the extreme Left, almost among the Syndicalist-anarchist group, he has become the rampart of the most conservative Right. If he has always maintained personal points of support in the varied political sectors of the Left, his firmest backing is the half-Fascist *Croix de Feu* element, later transformed into the *Parti Social Français* and led by Colonel de la Rocque.

We have shown how he sought to *cover* his return to public affairs with the military prestige of Marshal Pétain, just as he had earlier succeeded, after a first eclipse, in finding his way into the team of Père Doumergue who had been called upon, on his advice, to save the Republic following the minor riot of February 6th, 1934. Shortly before the present war he had planned a great scheme, namely to secure the election of M. Fernand Bouisson, a man of his circle, to the Presidency of the Republic on the expiration of M. Albert Lebrun's seven years of office. It failed, as we know, owing to the re-election of M. Albert Lebrun on the initiative of M. Daladier.

"I had chosen a bad candidate!" Pierre Laval said one day in a bantering tone. But the truth is that he had not yet regained enough political strength to succeed, whether with the candidate he had selected or another. He certainly harboured a grudge against both M. Daladier and M. Albert Lebrun on this account.

Passing from internal to external politics, Laval's most celebrated activities were concerned with the Franco-Italian agreement of January, 1935, the Stresa agreements of April, 1935, with sanctions in the Abyssinian affair and with the still-born Hoare-Laval pact which, by the way, I have been reliably informed, Signor Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London, had received instructions to sign before a tidal wave swept it away. All these matters were still fresh in the public mind and caused Laval to be looked on in England as an enemy. I am not sure that he was one to the extent that London believed. On that, as on many other occasions, he put me in mind of those



circus riders who dance first on one and then on the other of the two horses of their team. They start off, legs apart, one foot on the rump of each beast, then they jump from one to the other. Whip and rein control the animals. Finally they throw kisses to the crowd. Everything goes off splendidly—except once by mishap. Then it's a catastrophe.

An objective history of the Abyssinian business, to include the equitable distribution of the blame, calls for development of the subject at a length which would be out of place here. There was left over from it a keen resentment against M. Pierre Laval who, at times, had appeared to justify it more by attitudes, acrobatic feats and remarks behind the scenes than by any fundamental hostility. For his part, he imagined that from the Foreign Office in London plots were inspired against him in France to bring about his disappearance and that a regular ban was being organised against him every time a new French Ministry was formed. Those who wanted to bar his way did not fail to make him believe this, sheltering themselves behind this excuse for his omission. M. Laval's real error lay in thinking that in all cases it was possible to use electoral methods of action in the negotiations between one Chancellery and another. The old slow, finicking, remote diplomacy has often shown itself to be harmful, and never so much as that form of it whose effects we have seen during the last dozen years in too many affairs which have turned out badly.

With regard to Germany, M. Pierre Laval formerly cherished the ambition of wheedling Hitler. He had direct, but more especially indirect contacts with Herr von Ribbentrop, through the good offices of M. de Brinon. The German Ambassador had his own particular means of access to him without asking for an official interview, which does not mean that M. Pierre Laval placed excessive confidence in him.

On his way back from his journey to Russia, where he

## M. Pierre Laval Makes Ready to Return 151

had gone to sign the Franco-Soviet pact, he had, at Cracow, following Pilsudski's funeral, an interview with Goering, a long one, which in the language of diplomacy, was only of an exploratory and informative nature. On his own testimony, M. Pierre Laval had shown extreme prudence and, while stressing his desire to establish cordial relations with Germany, had been careful to conduct himself as the guardian of the interests of our Central European Allies. Against the charge of nourishing the idea of a gentleman's agreement with Nazi Germany and of putting up a gang-plank between Nazi Germany and himself, he offered no defence. This was at once the dream of a man who has presumably never studied German history and the pretention of a clever man to believe that sleight of hand can serve every purpose. There are cases where it is no good at all, and he was to find that out soon enough.

In October, 1939, when we had the conversation the essential parts of which I have reported, and in the ensuing months, M. Pierre Laval was a man almost entirely dominated by one directing principle, the determination to return to power. This was known and so was his talent for intrigue. Consequently he was thought to be behind, at the heart of or on the fringe of all the plots which were being hatched. If he was not involved in them all, he had his eye on them all and held himself ready to prevent them succeeding at his expense or without him. He did not, however, take any responsibility for those which were too clearly defeatist in character, denying that he was in alliance with those who inspired or were the life and soul of them. He made a point of dissociating himself from all of that complexion. In contradistinction even, he laid increasing stress on his determination to conduct the war, since it had come to war, with the maximum of firmness and to the full extent of our resources. But it was all in vain. In the opinion of the French political world and still more abroad, as soon as

## 152      Truth on the Tragedy of France

they were known, his goings on looked suspiciously like a campaign for a speedy peace. The truth is he was playing two games at once, that of victor and that of peacemaker. But no one was willing to be taken in and everybody was convinced that he was betting far more heavily on peace, on whatever terms, provided it was not long delayed than on victory. The verification of this would be no great burden on the shoulders of the future. When Laval entered the lists, it would be to ratify defeat.

## Chapter XII

### An Unhealthy Winter

AN UNWHOLESOME ATMOSPHERE—THE SPIRIT OF WAR IS LACKING—"IN THE DUG-OUTS"—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S QUESTION—PEACE INITIATIVE OF THE QUEEN OF HOLLAND AND THE KING OF THE BELGIANS—FRANCO-BRITISH AGREEMENTS GOVERNING FINANCE AND ECONOMIC CO-ORDINATION—A SCANDALOUS SITTING IN THE CHAMBER—EXPULSION OF THE COMMUNIST DEPUTY, M. FLORIMOND BONTÉ—A CRISIS IMMINENT—M. REYNAUD MAKES A "PREMIER'S" SPEECH—RUSSIA ATTACKS FINLAND—THE POSITION OF ITALY—THE FRENCH YELLOW BOOK—M. GEORGES BONNET SAYS: "IT IS MY REHABILITATION"—M. DALADIER THINKS OF MAKING FAR-REACHING CHANGES IN HIS CABINET—HIS DISASTROUS RIDING ACCIDENT

It can be said without exaggeration that the whole winter of 1939 was dominated by open and secret struggles between parties.

France was at war and yet she was not. She was at war in that masses of men were mobilised and that there were communiqués and speeches. There were isolated exploits, for despite the general inaction there were skirmishes and real engagements between the Maginot and Siegfried Lines. Above all, there was the silent and arduous task of the sailors around the coasts and on the oceans. On the populace, likewise, there were the repercussions of every kind implicit in a war of this scope. But, against this, there was an unhealthy atmosphere

which I have attempted to describe in earlier chapters. Worse still, something absolutely indispensable was lacking. On almost every side that flame was absent which should have burnt in every Frenchman whatever civil or military post of combat he might occupy. The *spirit of war* was lacking. It was lacking in the Ministries: it was lacking in the High Command, in the army, in the factories, in high society, in the middle class, in the Press and in Parliament. Exceptions were few.

Among the ordinary population and in working-class districts German propaganda was intense. Many Communists were arrested, but the kernels of the organisation remained. When one agent vanished, another came to view. Onerous taxes were criticised. Tradesmen complained that they could no longer sell anything. Soldiers' families compared the small pittances they received with the wages of the workmen. People listened to the "traitor of Stuttgart" who accused the English of having wanted the war. Everything tended to break the backbone of the nation without anything much being done to remedy the process. It was in certain isolated working-class centres, not contaminated by Communist poison or the pacifist propaganda of M. Paul Faure's friends and of Syndicalists like M. Delmas and M. Belin, that the best spirit existed, thanks to the old Blanquist\* atavism of the French workers and also to the attitude of M. Léon Blum who almost every day, in the *Populaire*, upheld against Hitlerism the patriotism of that French Socialist faction of which he was the leader. If history, to whose judgment he will perhaps contribute by an avowal which, coming from him, would not astonish me—if history ranges him among those indirectly responsible for the war owing to his errors both as Party and Government leader, it will also have to pay tribute to him for having

\* Louis Blanqui (1805-1881), a Leader of the advanced Republicans, was many times imprisoned for his political activities, notably following the "Commune" of 1871.

unremittingly sought to repair them from the moment when he saw war loom over the horizon.

This authentic utterance of his was widely quoted : " At the present moment I will ally myself with any former adversary whatsoever, even with Flandin, if Flandin recognises that there is only one policy to pursue, the policy of winning the war."

At the other end of the scale, M. Charles Maurras, possibly the most biased and implacable opponent of M. Blum, fostered in the readers of *L'Action Française*, whose leader he was, the classic anti-Germanism of the old régime. How sad it will be later to see him, in a sort of collapse of his intelligence, throw all his doctrine in the fire (including, perhaps, the treaties of Westphalia!) and rally to the Government of the capitulation! When giving the Marshal a military salute he will forget that he used to go about everywhere clamouring for a Pétain Cabinet. Pétain who stood, according to him, for the maximum of defence, resistance and organisation, for war without mercy against the eternal enemy!

A book appeared which took the same resolute line. This was *L'Allemagne*, a collection of prophetic articles by the late Jacques Bainville who kept alive anti-German thought among the youth of the Right. Hervé Bainville, the young son of this great writer,\* too soon gone from us, burned to fight. He begged me to intervene in order to expedite his entry into the French Air Force. When I asked him what reasons lay behind the request, he looked me full in the eyes and answered firmly: "*The son of Jacques Bainville must not wait until the war is over. . . . And I want to have the right to speak afterwards.*"

From Blum to Bainville! What an admirable headline of French moral unity that would be, were there not

\* Born at Vincennes in 1879, Jacques Bainville, a historian known particularly for his anti-pan-Germanist campaign, a work on Germany and his *Napoleon*, etc., died not long after his election to the French Academy in 1935.

unfortunately so much empty space between! One almost wonders whether an opaque veil did not cover the brains of the majority of Frenchmen!

Faithful to his policy of waiting, M. Daladier said to his Ministers during a Cabinet meeting at which he had explained the military situation and the threats against Holland, now announced as imminent and then deferred: "*We are in our dug-outs; let them leave us there as long as possible.*"

The Commissions of the Army and the Senate sent controllers to the armies. General Gamelin complained of their intrusion in the conduct of military affairs. To which they replied that their sole offence lay in having drawn attention to notable deficiencies. Families demanded leave for husbands and sons who had been called up. The Government granted it, Gamelin protested, offered to resign and then gave in.

The Commander of the Colonial troops produced a scheme for a field army for which thousands of African natives should be trained in turn. The Generalissimo answered that it was premature, since they did not know what they would be doing in a few months. M. Dautry, the industrialist who had been commissioned to organise production, under the title of Minister of Armaments, complained that General Headquarters did not even reply to his requests for specialist workers. He asked for 400,000 of them.

M. Déat, a deputy, the same who had written at the height of the international crisis before Hitler made up his mind: "*France will not fight for Dantzig,*" was prosecuted for having signed an anti-patriotic manifesto. He repudiated his signature and, under pressure by some of his colleagues, the case was withdrawn. He was thus fully at liberty to resume a defeatist campaign which would bloom under the protection of the German troops.

Was Mr. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, aware of this when, passing through Paris, he

asked M. Campinchi, the Minister of Marine, who was his host at lunch: "Are they standing firm here?"

The Queen of Holland and the King of the Belgians, the latter abruptly taking the initiative, sent a telegram to the Heads of States in Germany, Great Britain and France, offering their good offices with a view to making peace. The action went for nothing, but the conspirators in Paris did not fail to make use of it to weaken the spirit of resistance still further in the circles where they were at work. At a meeting of the Belgian Labour Party a Belgian Minister challenged by a member of his party who reproached him for excessive "neutralism," cleared himself of the charge by reading a letter from a French Socialist deputy congratulating him on his efforts in the cause of peace: "Do you want me to be more French than the French?" he asked.

There was one ray of light amid these miserable incidents in which French politics were dragging themselves along. Franco-British solidarity was growing. At a meeting of the Supreme War Council in London M. Daladier signed an agreement of Anglo-French economic co-ordination with Mr. Chamberlain, and, two days after, M. Paul Reynaud prepared a financial arrangement with Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the other hand relations between the French Premier and various members of the Government continued to be so strained that when the Houses reassembled in extraordinary\* session on November 30th, all the talk centred about a possible crisis.

The first sitting seemed to give the lie to the pessimistic forecasts. Opened by a statement from M. Daladier, one of the best he had made since the beginning of the war, it was marked by an incident scandalous in its origin but reassuring by the summary execution to which it gave rise.

\* Not extraordinary in the sense of exceptional. In the French Parliamentary year there are the "session ordinaire," generally the longer, and the "session extraordinaire" beginning, after the recess, in the late autumn.



M. Daladier had barely begun to recall in what conditions war "*had been imposed on us not only by the German aggression against Poland, following on other acts of aggression, but by the systematic determination of the Nazi Government to forge ahead through this destruction by means of a slavery imposed, now in the name of race, now in contempt of race, towards the domination of Europe,*" when a sort of surge swept the assembly.

From the Galleries one could see the Speaker\* making soothing gestures, putting a finger to his lips, waving his hand and glancing in eloquent appeal for silence and calm. But someone in the centre had risen. His voice thundered. With his right forefinger he pointed to a man sitting alone in the benches formerly occupied by the Communists. It was M. Florimond Bonté, Communist Deputy for the Nord, Secretary of the Communist Group in the Chamber, who, threatened by judicial proceedings and undiscovered as yet by the police, had succeeded in slipping into the supposedly inviolable precincts of the House. The orator upright in the centre of the Chamber was M. Jean Chiappe who, having harried them unmercifully when he was Prefect of Police from 1927 to 1934, had not ceased to denounce the Communists as foreign agents. Jean Chiappe was indignant. "What! Have not warrants of arrest been issued against the Communist Deputies? How is it that this one has been allowed to enter? The Chamber cannot sit in his presence."

Shouts of "Outside, outside!" supported the demands of Jean Chiappe, whilst "quaestors," who are alone charged with the policing of the House, laid hold, with the aid of the ushers, on the person of M. Florimond Bonté who was removed from the building and handed over to the police.

During this execution M. Daladier had remained standing

\* In France the Speaker is elected not for the whole duration of the Parliament, but for the period of one year. He may, of course, be re-elected.

in the rostrum. When he resumed the reading of his statement prolonged applause punctuated the withering strictures with which he favoured the "accomplices of the enemy, and the traitors, from wherever they come and whatever may be the masks they put on their faces." He received support unequivocal, at least in appearance, when he stated explicitly that France would only lay down her arms "when she could negotiate with a Government whose signature would be binding" and when she "could obtain a security strongly organised and resting on material guarantees which would ensure its duration." Above all, did he receive evidence of support when with voice and gesture he emphasised this programme: "We must make war and we must win it."

After that sitting one might well believe that the atmosphere was wholly cleansed. But the afternoon one proved the contrary. Internal policy reassumed what it considered its rights. Disappointed or impatient ambitions exploited legitimate causes of dissatisfaction, with which M. Daladier had not sufficiently concerned himself, as well as the just anxiety felt by many deputies to unite in securing an appreciable improvement in the conduct of the war. There was wrangling over the *plenary powers*, of which the Government demanded renewal. M. Daladier resisted the amendments by which the opposition proposed to limit these powers. He refused to accord them to the Chamber, but accepted similar restrictions from the Senate. Asked the reason, he answered that a wind of conspiracy was blowing in the Chamber before which he had been unwilling to bow despite the enticements of benevolent brokers eager to push themselves forward.

The impression of Parliamentarians of long experience was that the sitting had proved the possibility of an overthrow of the Cabinet. M. Frossard who, as is well known, was a candidate for the Ministry of Information, asserted that the Government had taken a shrewd blow and that it was only a question of weeks.

M. Daladier, who has a good nose for danger, realised this and grew angry. His annoyance vented itself on those of his Ministers whom he accused of having guided the cabal: M. Reynaud and M. Mandel. He announced to anyone who approached him that he was going to replace them, which did not mean that he would actually do so. At the dinner given by M. Paul Reynaud on December 3rd at the Ministry of Finance in honour of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, who had come to Paris to settle the financial arrangements prepared in London during a recent visit of the French Finance Minister, the possible crisis was the topic of all the private conversations. Some people wondered whether M. Daladier wanted to be overthrown, in the certainty that the President of the Republic would ask him to reconstruct the Cabinet. Others criticised the isolation in which he immured himself, complaining of the difficulty they had in reaching his study to inform him of what they knew, feared, or desired in connection with the conduct of the war. Léon Blum regretted that Daladier was so touchy and deprived himself thereby of very useful collaborators. Paul Reynaud asserted that Daladier had had his post offered to a former Finance Minister, present that evening, who was supposed to have replied: "M. Daladier has as Minister of Finance a man who has succeeded too well for the Premier not to be advised to cling on to him for all he is worth."

"And suppose," I said to him, "the Prime Minister has only been diverting himself in order to exasperate you?"

If M. Reynaud grew fidgety, M. Mandel, for his part, cleared the matter up once more. He went to the Prime Minister and came straight to the point. He, in a conspiracy? Which one? At the moment he had only one ambition, to remain at the Colonial Office where he had been successful, and he had not yet finished the task he had assigned to himself. The Premiership?

"You," he said, "are the only possible man under the

present circumstances. If you were not, it could not be me, because I'm an Israelite, and on account of Hitler. He does not like Jews, and there are so many people hereabouts who are anxious to humour him."

Daladier smiled.

"Exactly," he said significantly.

"If I have made criticisms," Mandel continued, "I have made them to the Cabinet without shirking my responsibilities, and I desire only one thing, for you and for the country, namely that there should no longer be any ground for these criticisms."

They parted good friends, but M. Daladier continued to be mistrustful. Had not Mandel got a covetous eye on the Ministry of the Interior and, to get it, did he not want a crisis? For all that he did not accuse him of having promoted the plot.

As for Reynaud he seized the occasion of the Franco-British monetary agreement to make a speech in the Chamber, half financial and half general, filled with courage and ideas, and which was immediately labelled "*Prime Minister's speech*" both by people who found the speech excellent and by those who wanted to rouse M. Daladier against him: and these latter were many! Ridiculous monkey tricks, enough to make anyone lose his composure! Worse than that! Enough to lose the war! When one considers what all this represented in time, in vitality, in strength wasted while so many other problems demanded urgent attention!

It was Russia which broke with little Finland on November 30th, and next day went to war against this people small in number but great in moral qualities. The Finns called for help. Hitler remained deaf and only stirred to prevent the arrival on the Mannerheim Line of some Italian planes despatched by Mussolini in a fleeting spasm of independence. The League at Geneva could do no more than expel the U.S.S.R. and collect some fine moral precepts. England and France heard the cries for help

uttered by the Finns. They replied "Present," but Helsinki was far, very far. "It's a long way off."

Great Britain was still under the stress of anxiety caused to the Admiralty and the people by the magnetic mines. She would overcome the problem as she did others, but it was asking a lot to expect her to cope with too many difficulties at once. On the other hand in England, where perhaps the opportunity for an Anglo-Russian understanding was let slip in April, 1939, there were members of the Government and men of importance and weight who held that the proper policy to adopt towards the Soviets was to take no compromising steps and to *wait and see*. Moscow would never make decisions save in the strictest accord with her own interests. It was useless therefore to form conclusions in advance. The only thing to do was to leave the way open to tacit agreements which these interests might one day inspire. Consequently there was hesitation about the method of helping the small nation which was heroically putting up an obstinate and deadly resistance against the Russian troops who were surprised at not being able to enjoy a military "walk-over."

This indeterminate shuffling took time, a great deal of time. In military and in certain political circles in which he was the great hope, there was much talk of General Weygand and of the views he was putting forward. He had organised an army in Syria. He came back from Turkey where, more or less under the terms of the Franco-Turkish treaty, he had made military contacts, and he broke his journey in Greece and Yugo-Slavia. The moment seemed to him favourable for an Eastern front. In no uncertain manner he notified the Ministry of War which passed on the information to the British Government, but the English were markedly reticent. In addition to the fact that they are often slow to take in the usefulness of new plans, they were, in face of this particular one, somewhat alarmed by the large share which would fall to their lot in the matter of transport, troops and convoy-

ing. Moreover the execution of the scheme necessarily introduced the great problem of Italy. Her co-operation being temporarily ruled out, there was her tolerance to be won, or her resignation if we were in a position to compel it. Now Italy inspired fears. In the Chamber of Deputies on November 30th, M. Daladier had devoted part of his statement to a review of French relations with other countries, and had inserted in it a sentence referring to Italy. He had indeed formed the opinion that he could not preserve on this subject a silence which might have appeared disparaging. But in order that the Duce could not pretend to be inconvenienced thereby, the text had been submitted to the Ambassador, who had declared himself delighted with it.

Now, acting under orders, the Italian daily Press did not breathe a word of the French Premier's statement, and in diplomatic circles in Rome it was therefore deduced that pro-German influence was exercising an increasingly strong hold on Mussolini. The Ambassador was only showing professional diplomacy when he declared that such rumours were worthless. "The Franco-Italian *rapprochement* will take place," he said, "but great patience is necessary."

*Si non e vero e bene trovato.*

The speech made by Count Ciano did nothing to clarify the situation. It was balanced in such a way that each, according to his own tastes, could find in it food for uneasiness or confidence. The Italian Foreign Minister ended by theatrically swearing to the Duce that all would obey him when he gave the order: "*for what he wanted, when he wanted, and how he wanted.*" This "how he wanted" became the subject of controversy. The hair-splitters were able to indulge their failing to their heart's content.

As a matter of fact this was not the most interesting point in the speech. The passage in which Count Ciano described his conversations with Herr von Ribbentrop before Germany's entry into the war was of historic importance.

He stated, or allowed it to be believed, that there was not yet any military pledge and co-operation between the Axis partners, and that it had been understood, if not agreed, that any war venture was to be deferred for at least three years. Observers elected to see in this revelation a reply to ill-disposed persons who, in every quarter and even in Germany, poured ridicule on the Italian attitude which was adorned for the occasion with the pleasing appellation *non-belligerence*.

Publication by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Yellow Book, a collection of the principal "documents relative to the events and negotiations which preceded the opening of hostilities between Germany on one side and Poland, Great Britain and France on the other" created a profound sensation everywhere. A popular edition had to be printed of which, it is said, half a million copies were sold within the space of a few days. M. Georges Bonnet went about proclaiming that the Yellow Book constituted his rehabilitation. I have already mentioned that he collaborated closely in the selection of the documents. Selection implies elimination. It was freely related that one of the documents put aside, a telegram from M. Coulondre, reported the exceptionally vehement claim of Herr von Ribbentrop to have obtained from M. Georges Bonnet French renunciation of all interference in Central Europe.

M. Daladier wanted to include this telegram in the Yellow Book. "It does not incriminate France," he said. "If you suppress everything recalling that Bonnet has often neutralised the policy of firmness which was that of the whole Government, the Yellow Book will look as though it were his glorification."

The insistence of the Quai d'Orsay officials had carried their point on grounds of expediency and Daladier duly took note.

"Georges Bonnet is raising his head again, you see."

To which someone replied: "If he's renouncing his errors, so much the better!"

Viewed at some distance of time this incident assumes importance. If M. Georges Bonnet, in dedicating the Yellow Book to some friends of his known for their spirit of resistance, was able to say: "Here is my rehabilitation," his exclamation at the end of December, 1939, condemns his accusation of to-day. If, on the contrary, in the summer of 1940, he claims as true Herr von Ribbentrop's allegation which he denied in December, 1939, it is not M. Daladier and his "bellicose" colleagues, but himself that he accuses of being one of the people chiefly to blame for the war, because by a renunciation which he had no right to make, he encouraged the Foreign Minister of the Reich to embark on the Polish adventure. The dilemma is grievous.

Political difficulties, external uncertainty, threats, which hurtled through the air at almost regular intervals, of a German offensive either against the Maginot Line or through Belgium, Holland or Switzerland—these were more than enough to induce the Prime Minister to consider once more a reconstruction of his Cabinet. All his real friends told him that the moment had come to form the Great War Ministry. He agreed. But would not the obstacles he had shunned in September be just as difficult to surmount now? And could he bring himself to essay the leap? He turned the problem over and over in his mind from every aspect. The cards in his hand were still the same. Herriot, Blum, Paul Faure, Marin and Reynaud? And Mandel? And what about the Ministry of Information? Should it be Frossard or Mistler? And should he himself give up the Ministry of War or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? If he left the Ministry of War, whom should he put in? Reynaud? He distrusted him more and more. Leave the Foreign Office? He could neither put Bonnet back there nor yield to the fervent wishes of Chautemps, who would not be much better. What about



a re-shuffle on a limited scale? That would solve nothing. Yet to do nothing, as the President of the Republic advised, would mean remaining in the rut. A Great Ministry—if you imagine that's a simple matter!

At last, one Saturday, he made up his mind. He had received many people and sounded them all. He would go and spend the week-end an hour's run from Paris. Almost as he got into the car, a friend implored him to carry the task through, to treat routine without ceremony, not to bog himself by considering the proportions of the several parties, to take his decision alone and, once he had taken it, to put it into effect in a few hours. M. Daladier smiled, and slapped his portfolio crammed with papers.

"I'll work at it to-morrow," he said. "Come back and see me on Monday. You'll be satisfied. By then it will be done."

Then there happened what one never foresees. For Cromwell it was the calculation immortalised by Bossuet. For Daladier it was an accident, a stupid, banal accident. On the Sunday he was riding in the forest, meditating, reflecting, perhaps, on what Louis Marin, Leader of the Republican Federation, or some other visitor, had said to him two days before, perhaps he was settling his plan or fixing his choice. Did he have a momentary abstraction? Did he leave go of the reins? The ground was hardened by frost. The horse slipped and he fell with his foot caught in the stirrup. He was alone and got back into the saddle as best he could to return to his host's house. This was on the 7th of January—note this little date.

M. Daladier, a sick man, would not form the Great Ministry as necessary as it was eagerly desired. The political unease would grow greater with all that that implied. Day after day events in Finland would add fresh subjects of trouble! When M. Daladier was able to get up and go to the House it would only be at the cost of painful fatigue. No longer having the full equilibrium of his physical and moral health, he would appear there in the

guise of a man whom there was a good prospect of defeating. His adversaries would become the more savage and he would defend himself the less skilfully.

The next day, January 8th, an ex-Premier was going along the lobbies of the House. He was told of the accident that had befallen Daladier. A far-away expression came into his eyes.

"Poor Daladier," he said. "That's a bad sign."

Those about him looked astonished. He raised an arm that was still stiffened.

"Take my word for it. A politician has no right to have accidents."

The man who spoke was M. Pierre Etienne Flandin, whose Government fell as the result of a foolish motoring collision in which he broke his arm. M. Pierre Etienne Flandin was not mistaken. What was to happen on March 20th had its origin on January 7th.

## Chapter XIII

### Neither an Armistice nor a Separate Peace

SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF THE DECLARATION FORBIDDING GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE TO ENTER UPON SEPARATE NEGOTIATIONS FOR ARMISTICE AND PEACE—WHY M. DALADIER DEFERRED THE SIGNING OF IT—THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF DECEMBER 19TH

It was only on March 28th, and by M. Paul Reynaud, Premier since the twenty-second of that month, that, at the meeting of the Supreme War Council in London, there was signed with Mr. Chamberlain the solemn declaration by which the British and French Governments pledged themselves neither to negotiate nor conclude an armistice or treaty of peace except by mutual agreement, and not, further, to discuss peace terms, except after reaching agreement "on the conditions necessary to ensure to each of them effective and lasting guarantees of their security."

But it was during the Supreme Council Meeting of December 19th, presided over by M. Daladier in Paris, that the question had been raised and preliminary steps initiated by Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax. This had been done in conditions which compel me to put myself forward a little. I do so without modesty, for my action in this affair is, as I have already been careful to point out, one of those to which I lay claim with pride.

As early as September 11th, following a particularly venomous speech from Marshal Goering, I launched in the *Petit Parisien* the idea of a pact which should bind together our two Governments, our two diplomacies, our two armies, our two navies, our two peoples.

"But," exclaimed M. Georges Bonnet in private

## Neither an Armistice nor a Separate Peace 169

conversation, as I have recalled in an earlier chapter, "*that is to shut the door against all negotiations.*"

He was not mistaken, that was certainly my design. I wanted to protect the two nations both against the enemy and against themselves. I wanted to preserve the two Governments from manœuvres directed alike from within and from without.

Then I returned frequently to the charge. The first occasion was in commenting on the communiqué issued at the first meeting of the Supreme War Council. The next date was on October 11th, when, as a retort to a speech by Hitler, I wrote: "*It would be well that Hitler should learn by a solemn declaration of Great Britain and France that he must not, that he must never, count on a separate peace either with us or with our Allies.*"

It was the same again on October 26th, after Herr von Ribbentrop's speech at Dantzig, and also on January 1st, 1940.

I did not confine myself to this public action. There were hardly any important conversations with the politicians of my country in which I did not enlarge upon the necessity for bolting, as it were, and padlocking the alliance of the two countries. It was not that I had the slightest suspicions regarding the firmness of the British leaders. But in France I saw going, coming, talking and bestirring themselves people of every category—politicians devoured by ambition, business men, industrialists, journalists, and plain cowards—who, more or less openly, according to their temperament and the propitiousness of the circumstances at the time, walked about with a white flag for cockade.

The first time I took it upon myself to inform M. Daladier of my apprehensions—it was at the beginning of October when he was giving his attention to the defeatist conspiracy which was on the prowl around the executive power—he listened to me closely, made a note, and I did not insist further.

Later, I fancy it was the very day when I had challenged Herr von Ribbentrop's speech, I asked him whether my conclusion might embarrass the policy of the Government. He replied in a tone of friendly gruffness: "*If I entered upon the war, it was not in order to make a separate peace.*"

"Yes, yes! I am sure of that. But what of the others?"

He made a gesture which signified: "I can only answer for myself."

I emphasised the ravages of defeatist propaganda. They extended to all parties. They were seeping into Trades Union circles, they were spreading like patches of oil in middle-class drawing-rooms, where the fear of Bolshevism was skilfully exploited, they flaunted themselves in the restricted circles of neo-Fascist conspirators.

Did the conviction behind my words make an impression on him? He became confidential, he referred cautiously to fears of an offensive, he made a remark wholly to his honour, which would have borne witness, had I needed proof, to the alarm of an ardent patriotism sorely troubled by the memory of collective mistakes. But I will not reproduce it. Detached from the intimate atmosphere of the conversation, its meaning might be distorted, and I should never forgive myself for having put a weapon into the hands of his enemies, when this utterance ought, on the contrary, to be a piece of evidence in his favour.

Then, in the low voice he assumed when talking of serious matters, as though he feared the walls might have enemy ears, M. Daladier murmured: "*I ask nothing better than that they should wage a passive war as long as possible. Meanwhile the production of armaments and aeroplanes is gaining momentum.*"

This state of mind was certainly not unknown to me. He had never sought to disguise it in my presence. It had been his, as I have already disclosed, since the beginning of the war, and it was in order to leave the enemy in ignorance of his resolves that he put aside any public

## Neither an Armistice nor a Separate Peace 171

action calculated to awaken Hitler and Ribbentrop from their dream of driving a wedge between the Allies.

But, as far as the basic principle of the question was concerned, there was, I believe, no disagreement between him and me.

In calling for this declaration of no separate peace, I was not thwarting his tactics. On the contrary, I was furthering them, since the mere fact of my request proved that he had not yet made up his mind and allowed the Wilhelmstrasse to remain in anxious uncertainty of his intentions. On the other hand, from my point of view, my insistence made the defeatist party uneasy—it is time we began to call it by its proper name, for there was a defeatist party—and obliged it to measure its steps instead of lengthening them. Finally, it had another object, to lead the two Governments to a solution which was gradually gaining ground in the minds of many. If it was only the actual public announcement of the inter-allied pledges not to be a party to a separate peace or even to any negotiations for such a peace which now caused some difficulty, there was no reason why that should be an obstacle. All that was needed was to sign the agreement and keep it secret until the day when there was no longer any reason to keep it dark, and when, on the contrary, there might easily be occasion for self-congratulation on both sides for having signed it.

This was the point of view of several prominent people in Great Britain and France. As for myself, I noted with satisfaction that I was no longer a lone propagandist, and, as for the Prime Minister, he had not failed to realise the prime interest to him of being able to subordinate his adhesion to the agreement to the promise of *material guarantees of French security in the future*. He was in no hurry to give his adhesion, even secretly, but his mind had settled firmly on this point.

“No separate peace! That goes without saying. But, since we have got to put it down on paper, let us put

down something else which is essential for France, whose misfortune it is to have so uncomfortable a neighbour as Germany : let us have *the fixing of material guarantees of French security.*"

This was the position when the Supreme War Council met in Paris on December 19th.

Mr. Chamberlain, I imagine, naturally sounded the French Government on the matter of entering this question in the Council's order of the day. There was no refusal—that would have been disparaging—but there was also no visible reaction to the suggestion. Mr. Chamberlain was considerably puzzled over how to broach the subject. Neither Lord Halifax nor he wished to give the impression that there was any doubt in their minds of the solidity of the French alliance. Thus it was that I had the honour, for which I thank him at a distance, of having given Mr. Chamberlain the means of approaching the matter. To make it clear that his suggestion was not inspired by the faintest mistrust, he sheltered it behind a French opinion. He recalled that it had been strongly advocated by a French journalist in a great organ of the Press, the *Petit Parisien*. As for the arguments to support it, he had no need of mine.

A few days later, before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber, M. Daladier reviewed the events in progress, the negotiations with foreign States, and the relations with our Ally. He informed his colleagues of the friendly discussion which had taken place at the Supreme Council about the contingency of a joint declaration by the two Governments intended to avert any possibility of a separate peace. Some people pulled wry faces, but did not venture to disclose their disappointment. Had not the Premier just definitely stated that, as a counterpart to the pact, he had asked for the insertion of a formal clause for future guarantees of French security !

Between December 19th and March 28th much water was to flow under the bridges, but the affair was under

## Neither an Armistice nor a Separate Peace 173

way and was bound to reach its destination. It did under the driving power of Mr. Chamberlain and M. Paul Reynaud, and contained a formula which took what M. Daladier had required into account. Here it is :

*"The two Governments undertake not to discuss peace terms before reaching complete agreement on the conditions necessary to ensure to each of them an effective and lasting guarantee of their security."*

Two days earlier, the capitulation of Finland had led me to renew the expression of my view. I had written in the *Petit Parisien* :

*"Why does not the Franco-British alliance assert itself at the earliest possible moment in a solemn declaration pledging Great Britain and France to indissoluble union for all time?"*

When, with my whole soul as Frenchman and ally, I was working ceaselessly to hasten the conclusion of this clear and explicit contract, I was also assuring myself that it would sever the defeatist conspiracy at its roots, and that, once the word was given, there would be no one who would go back on it, still less betray it.

Assuredly I did not imagine that the very man who was to sign it a few days after attaining power would wriggle out of it when the moment came to honour his signature.

At this evocation of the past, I think of Edouard Daladier, Daladier who looked as though he were opposed to it, but who in reality was not, and I say : "In my soul and conscience I am sure that, if Daladier had remained Prime Minister, he would sooner or later have scrawled his signature at the foot of that document of March 28th."

That was what I formally maintained in an interview on April 13th, at which M. Paul Reynaud was almost resentful because I had associated the name of M. Daladier with his in assigning the responsibility for this essential act.

"You found it when you inherited his estate," I told



## 174      Truth on the Tragedy of France

him, "and to you belongs the credit of having brought it to light without delay."

"I am sure," I said, "that one day or other Daladier would have signed it."

I am still more sure that, having signed it, he would sooner have allowed his hand to be cut off than be false to the signature of the baker's son.

## Chapter XIV

### Fall of M. Daladier

MELANCHOLY END OF THE FINNISH CAMPAIGN—THE SECRET SESSION OF FEBRUARY 10TH—"COME WHAT MAY, AND MAY GOD BE MY JUDGE!"—THE SESSION OF MARCH 12TH A BAD ONE FOR M. DALADIER—RIBBENTROP MAKES THINGS AWKWARD FOR M. GEORGES BONNET—MR. SUMNER WELLES' MISSION—M. BONNET TELLS THE AMERICAN VISITOR THAT THERE IS A PEACE PARTY IN FRANCE—SECRET SESSION OF THE SENATE—M. LAVAL'S ATTACK ON M. DALADIER—ANOTHER SECRET SESSION OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES—FALL OF M. DALADIER

I WILL not dally over describing the unfortunate Finnish campaign. The Soviet aggression began on November 30th. For more than three months little Finland, democratic Finland, greater in her weakness than the colossus who attacked her, kept him in check and at times made him reel. But resistance to numbers and to weight of material has limits which arithmetic can reckon.

The only possibility of enabling Finland to compel her adversary to release his hold would have been to rush to her aid at once, but for days and weeks people were content to sing her heroism and wish that she might accomplish a miracle. The Chancelleries exchanged notes, the staffs consulted maps and drew up reports. Her neighbours, Sweden and Norway, were even more afraid of incurring the anger of Germany than the reprisals of Russia if they officially granted right of passage to French

and British reinforcements. Then when England and France, overriding juridical and diplomatic hesitations and jostling military bureaucracy, made up their minds to intervene and quicken their pace in sending planes, rifles and guns ; when even boats laden with troops were on the point of departure to relieve the exhausted Finnish divisions, the little army of General Mannerheim, exhausted as much by its own successes as by the continued pressure of the enemy, was reduced to laying down arms and the Government of Helsinki was constrained to come to terms with the conquerors or—to be more accurate—with the conquered.

We shall all be able to draw bitter lessons from this, and the first is that the worst thing to do is always to wait, always to be late, and always to let favourable opportunities slip. Coalitions and democracies complacently hug the thought that time is working for them. It is not true. Time does not work for the man who puts off urgent duties until the morrow and who is paralysed by scruples.

M. Daladier was to have personal experience of this, though he had not deserved it in this affair. Whatever people may have said, he understood how much was at stake. To prevent the collapse of Finnish resistance did not fall within his province. But he was to suffer from the repercussions of it for many reasons.

In the first place he was the leader, and the leader who has the *kudos* of successes, even when he has neither foreseen them nor helped to bring them about, incurs the responsibility for failures, even when he can prove to his own satisfaction that he has tried almost everything to conjure them away.

He had had to convince the British Government which, at the very start, in order not to alienate the Russians, had been loath to embark on what it considered a hazardous adventure. In this connection the English and the French points of view have always been divergent. In London

diplomatic circles were extremely anxious not to strengthen the bond between Germany and Russia. In France the anti-Communist campaign, which had just come to a head with the downfall of the Communist deputies, inspired the external policy of part of both Houses and of sections of the *bourgeoisie*, and was using Finland as a means of breaking completely with Moscow. M. Daladier had had finally to overcome the opposition of his own military advisers, who had devoted all their wits to discouraging the expedition.

When news of the armistice negotiations between Russia and Finland filtered through, the shock was the more severe because French opinion had been wildly excited by the unequal contest, in which it had liked to hope that, after an interval of some thousands of years, the miracle of David and Goliath would be renewed.

The mass of opinion was lured into this illusion by the kind of revenge that emotionally it was thereby able to take against the German-Soviet pact and the treason of the French Communist Party. The anti-Soviet leaders fed it by going to the length of insisting, with a total lack of common sense, that war should be declared on Russia. Lastly, French opinion took very seriously the over-tardy decision of the inter-allied Higher Council to send men and material. It was known that at the secret session of February 10th M. Daladier had been loudly applauded by the Chamber when he had announced the imminent departure of French and Canadian troops and the dispatch of arms of all sorts, notably of one hundred and sixty pursuit planes (this figure should be remembered). A secret session is never quite secret. It was said more than once that M. Daladier, as if he wished to excuse himself for having diverted and continued to divert this material at the expense of the French Army, had exclaimed: "Come what may, and may God be my judge!"

And M. Léon Blum had interrupted:

"From now on your responsibility is shared."

People had been the more confident because, on the proposal of M. P. E. Flandin, an order of the day of all the groups in the Chamber had been triumphantly adopted with complete unanimity, and also because the news that the great War Ministry was going to be formed had quickly spread. By way of conclusion to his intervention in the debate, M. Daladier had pronounced these words :

*"I do not dispute that we must correct mistakes, co-ordinate efforts, and form a solid government. For my part, I do not wish to see us one day resuming old struggles."*

From this it had been deduced that the great administration was going to be set up. It was as though people had dreamed it.

The awakening was rude for the public. For M. Daladier the defeat of Finland would, after various upsets, lead to his own fall. He had had a presentiment of it: when he learned that the Finns were sending plenipotentiaries to Moscow to negotiate, he saw visions of a cruel future and had thoughts of resigning. At the Council of Ministers held on March 9th he gave an impression of lassitude and bitterness. We must not forget that he had had a riding accident on January 7th and had been tied to his chair for a long time as a result. He was able to get up, work and attend the secret session, at which his personal success had routed his opponents, but the healing of his wound was painful. Owing to the pain, which often deprived him of sleep, he sometimes lost control of his nerves at moments when self-restraint would have been his most valuable asset.

Thus it was that when questioned in the Chamber on March 12th he launched out into an unfortunate impromptu which was exploited to his disadvantage. The Parliamentary barometer, which had stood for some weeks at "set fair," moved over almost without transition to "stormy." A political chronicler whose wit was decidedly

mordant let fall in the Parliamentary lobbies the following sarcasm: "The Germans take all the strategic, we all the juridical positions, but we shall win the legal battle!"

And he enlarged upon it with the bitter remark: "They're carrying on the war like an electoral campaign, and counting on the ballot." That is to say, on to-morrow, always to-morrow.

M. Laval, who has a particularly reliable barometric sense, announced that at the next secret session of the Senate he would work out an interpellation\* on the diplomatic policy of France, and accompanied the news with this sally, which was passed from mouth to mouth: "*Secret sessions often end with the erection of triumphal arches under which the members of the Government pass. But at the Senate there won't be enough flowers to make so much as a bouquet.*"

M. Reynaud, who, following Homeric differences with one of his colleagues, the Minister of Supply, had tried, but in vain, to obtain from the Cabinet a sort of dictatorship as Finance Minister over the other Ministries, barely concealed the fact that he was in the running to succeed M. Daladier. It was reported that, with this ambition in view, he had had a meeting of reconciliation with M. Flandin. He denied it. M. Flandin did not contradict the story. But they both said that by the following November the financial position would be catastrophic, and that, unless there was a profound alteration in the conduct of the war in the interim, there would be nothing for it but to make peace. M. Georges Bonnet expatiated to the same effect, but based his argument on his interviews with Mr. Sumner Welles.

For M. Georges Bonnet the months of January and February had been saddened by the regrettable behaviour

\* The *interpellation* or challenging of a Government's or Minister's policy, while not quite the same as the formal moving of a vote of censure by the Opposition over here, constitutes a sufficiently severe criticism or indictment. (Translator's note.)

of Herr von Ribbentrop. The German newspapers had published a mass of documents, true and false, in which the signatory of the Franco-German Declaration of December, 1938, was implicated by his former partner. In particular, after a long conversation with M. Bonnet in the presence of Herr Welczeck, the Ambassador of the Reich in Paris, and of M. Léger, Secretary General of the French Foreign Office, Ribbentrop had dictated to his translator a detailed note in which he specified that he had disclosed Hitler's views about Central Europe without the French Minister having raised the least objection to them. Reports from the German Ambassador to his Government bearing on these visits to M. Bonnet were couched in very similar terms. The *Frankfort Gazette* commented on these documents, accusing M. Bonnet of : "*Showing a lack of character, in that having had a proper conception of the policy to pursue with Germany, he failed to carry it out, though he had pledged himself to do so.*"

During the publication of these documents and articles, which lasted some days, a Cabinet Council was held at the War Ministry in the office of M. Daladier who, still helpless from his riding accident, was installed in a wheel chair, his foot outstretched. The sitting had not yet begun. There were only two or three Ministers present. Then Georges Bonnet came in, and Daladier, in a mocking tone of voice, received him with these words : "The D.N.B. is paying a lot of attention to you."

"To you, too," retorted Georges Bonnet instantly, anxious, in these circumstances, to be solidly associated with his Chief.

It is fair to add that M. Georges Bonnet put up a splendid defence both in the lobbies of the Chamber and in a long letter which appeared in the *Oeuvre*. But his shoulders were galled by it, all the same. The arrival of Mr. Sumner Welles gave him confidence and he contrived to make skilful use of his coming.

He had got to know Mr. Sumner Welles when he was

appointed French Ambassador to the United States by M. Léon Blum in 1936. Now he was one of the twenty or thirty people with whom the United States Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had informatory conversations. Indeed, he had several, some in private, the remainder, as was quite natural, at official gatherings which he attended as an ex-Ambassador to Washington and as a former Minister for Foreign Affairs. I shall not write the history of Mr. Sumner Welles' mission which, moreover, had no visible results. M. Georges Bonnet has asserted, in more or less public conversations, that he had pointed out to Mr. Welles the necessity of a speedy peace in favour of which "a strong party" existed in France.

There is no reason to doubt his claim to have done so. What does seem to me important to note at this point in my study is that Mr. Sumner Welles' mission provided nourishment for the sly campaign of the "strong party," the existence of which had been affirmed by M. Georges Bonnet. When a genuine countess, renowned for her acute wit, which had spread its caustic quality far and wide in diplomatic circles, exclaimed in discounting Mr. Welles' journey: "We shall soon have finished with this cursed war," without bothering her head over what the end would be, she showed herself fully representative of that party whose civil status M. Georges Bonnet had established.

If this party bestirred itself, Mr. Sumner Welles was personally in no way to blame. No one could have been more correct and discreet than he. Charged by Mr. Roosevelt with discerning in the course of his conversations with heads of States and leading personalities in Germany, Italy, England and France, the state of mind of the peoples and their leaders, the possibilities of peace and the several war aims, he listened, noted and classified opinion without making public his own. Many hazarded the view that he had been grievously offended by the manners of Ribbentrop, shocked by Hitler's ways, and, in comparison, more



favourably impressed by Goering who had made efforts to please him. It was known that, the first time Mr. Sumner Welles passed through Rome, Mussolini had played the accomplished coquette and that Mr. Welles had not been unresponsive to the Duce's display of charm.

I should not like to bet my hat that the American Under-Secretary of State found Mussolini's fascination as great when he left Rome for New York as when he had left it for Berlin.

It will perhaps be remembered that Mr. Sumner Welles delayed his departure from the Eternal City while Signor Mussolini was going to the Italo-German frontier to meet Hitler. There was much criticism of this adjournment and some wondering whether there was not some mysterious link between the interview of the two dictators and the last conversation of Signor Mussolini with Sumner Welles. If Mussolini had anything to say on this subject to Mr. Welles it was nothing encouraging, for no further talk of it was heard. Nothing was left of Mr. Sumner Welles' visit but the memory of a very courteous man, of fine moral and physical qualities who, for grace of mind and distinction, could more than hold his own with any European diplomat.

For his memento of it, M. Daladier had a noble letter which Mr. Sumner Welles brought to him on behalf of Mr. Roosevelt. In introducing Mr. Sumner Welles to the Head of the French Government, the President of the United States of America assured him that he could have every confidence in his childhood friend and present collaborator, and that for his part he, the President, would never make himself the advocate against France of an indecisive and precarious peace. In view of what he had written, one can understand that Mr. Roosevelt suffered a violent shock when he learned of the Bordeaux capitulation.

That the "peace party" thought of using Mr. Sumner Welles' journey is beyond doubt! That its efforts in this

direction were vain was unmistakably evident from the moment the "Christian Foreigner's Service" published the message to Congress in which, on the eve of the reception of his emissary by the Pope, Mr. Roosevelt defined one of the essential conditions of the future peace:

"Peace cannot be real if the small nations are to live in dread of powerful neighbours. Peace is immoral if the guarantee against invasion has to be paid for with a tribute."

It must be added that the "peace party"—let us keep the name with which M. Georges Bonnet had christened it—had not waited for this speech before joining its efforts to those of the men who, on the contrary, reproached M. Daladier's Government with not conducting the war with sufficient energy. It was under the sign of resistance to the last ditch that they joined battle in the secret session of the Senate and won it at the secret session of the Chamber some days later.

The first sitting of the secret session of the Senate opened under the most grievous auspices. Peace was signed between Helsinki and Moscow. Parliament was under the influence of M. Daladier's unfortunate intervention in the Chamber two days previously. Behind the scenes of the Palais Bourbon lists of new governments were being openly drawn up. M. Flandin was leading a campaign in favour of M. Herriot. M. Léon Blum was aiming at M. Daladier, who had not shown him a full measure of the courtesy of which he was so greedy. His heart was wholly given to M. Paul Reynaud, who was pawing the ground with impatience.

The atmosphere grew more threatening still when it was learned that in London Mr. Chamberlain was likewise shaken by events.

It was M. Pierre Laval who opened fire in the Senate. This was the first time he had officially emerged from the public reserve he had imposed on himself since his fall in 1936.

The speech he made began as an apologia. Prepared, pruned, pondered over for four years, he distilled it with art and assurance. It was likewise an indictment. He did not reproach the Government for making war, he reproached it for making it badly and for virtually not making it at all:

"I accuse you," he cried, "of not making war as it ought to be made if we are to win it."

These words which, a fortnight earlier, would have fallen amid disapproving silence, were wildly applauded. A series of interruptions by M. Daladier did not put M. Laval out of countenance—he felt that he was supported, he gave his verve free play, and when a Senator called out melodramatically: "What would you do in his place?" he answered: "If you were the President of the Republic I would tell you."

These words produced a gale of laughter. He had achieved his purpose. So, without adding any further comment, he took advantage of it to leave the rostrum and rest on his laurels.

Admittedly, some part of the effect obtained was to wear off. There was much laughter over a shrewd thrust that M. Daladier proceeded to deal him. M. Laval had related how he had suggested to M. Daladier that he should go to Rome, not as a benevolent emissary, but with a mandate and something in his hand, only to receive no sort of response to his offer.

Maliciously the Premier read a telegram from M. François Poncet, Ambassador in Rome, in which, making himself the mouthpiece of Signor Mussolini and Count Ciano, he voiced their repugnance for any political plenipotentiary, and especially for M. Pierre Laval. But, taking it all round, another blow had been struck at the Government.

When it came to a division only sixty votes were cast against the Government, but the atmosphere was very bad. The Upper House had limited itself to an indication which the Chamber, due to meet on the following Tuesday,

was to be swift to take into account. The opponents of the Cabinet were at one in thinking that M. Daladier would swing the situation in his favour by confronting the Chamber with a new Government which he would have reconstructed during the four days at his disposal before the battle. This, notably, was the fear expressed by M. Frossard, who was preparing a fine indictment of the authorities at the Ministry of Information and who would only find pleasure in not delivering it if he were promoted to ministerial rank in the meanwhile. M. Daladier's friends begged and implored him, but he refused. It was not that once again since September, as we have already described, he had not pored over the complex problem that the constitution of a new government presents. But he had promised to cross swords with M. Léon Blum, and he made it a point of honour to appear in the arena on the appointed date. Each made his preparations. The most varied rumours circulated.

Note was taken of supposed differences between the Generalissimo Gamelin and General Georges, who was in command of the armies of the north-east.

Daladier, for his part, was more and more on edge. His opponents had not been mistaken in considering the frost at Rambouillet, on the day following January 7th, as a bad omen for him. He was to confess later that he had endured fearful nights of pain. He inveighed against all and sundry ; against the English, whom he reproached for having been so slow in taking action on behalf of Finland ; against the General Staff, who had hampered his demands ; against his collaborators, who had provided him with inaccurate statistics about the dispatch of planes to Finland. The figure of one hundred and sixty which he had given as that of aircraft sent, was in reality the combined total of planes sent and promised. He raged against such members of the Government as M. Reynaud, against M. Léon Blum, who, he said, was hand-in-glove with his Finance Minister. Most of all did he rail against himself

for not having resigned and left everything, either after his accident, or when the Finnish affair took a turn for the worse, or immediately after the signing of the Finnish-Soviet treaty of peace.

On March 19th the atmosphere was more than bad. For some years past the Ides of March have been favourable to none but Hitler, who chose the day regularly to decide his great enterprises. The day before, he had had that interview with Mussolini to which we have referred in connection with Mr. Sumner Welles. This meeting was not reassuring for M. Daladier, who reached the Palais Bourbon with a careworn brow. He had wanted to answer to his name in the ring, and already he had the appearance of a beaten man. There was a crowd in the hemi-cycle as on the days when the audience expects the devouring of the lion-tamer. Blum arrived looking very spry. Clearly, he must be content with the indictment he had prepared. Frossard wore the expression of a man sure of his stroke. On the Governmental benches the Ministers were grouped about their chief. Save for the one who was a candidate for the succession, they looked somewhat uneasy. M. Herriot displayed the solemnity of the man who is going to judge the rounds.

But the galleries emptied, the doors were closed. Except for a few mysterious nods and shakes of the head of deputies going in or out, nothing would be known before the sitting was suspended, which was to be at the end of the day. Chance willed it that I dined that evening at the same table as M. Piétri, whom his companions questioned as soon as he sat down. They showed more appetite for these revelations than for the excellent menu of a charming hostess. M. Piétri was scrupulous in not betraying the State secrets in his keeping, but he could not put an impassive mask on his face. He was well pleased while endeavouring to appear concerned. Without pressing him too hard, the company extracted the information that Blum had been in excellent form, and very

severe against Daladier ; further, that Frossard had been half one thing, half another, and Daladier not so much at his ease as usual.

" You understand, there was that figure there's such a fuss about. The other month he gave, as the number of planes sent to Finland, the total of those sent and promised. There's no recovering from mistakes like that."

" Then the Government is overthrown," I said.

" No, no ; but . . ."

I knew how matters stood. At four a.m., almost at dawn, came the vote : 239 to one for the Government ; but more than three hundred abstentions ! Cries of " Resign ! " rang out on the extreme Left. The " Bull of Vaucluse," as M. Daladier was occasionally called, had received something more than darts this time. The toreador had planted the sword firmly between his ribs.

Some hours later a small Cabinet Meeting took place at the Ministry of War. M. Daladier informed his colleagues of his decision. He was going to present the Government's resignation to the President of the Republic. As Vice-President of the Council, M. Chautemps, in the name of the Ministers as a whole, made a show of dissuading him. He had not been outvoted. He could allow himself full scope in strengthening his Government. His resignation and that of his colleagues were at his disposal to this end. M. Daladier thanked him and allowed his glance to rove over his team. What thoughts passed through his mind as his gaze rested now on one, now on another ? He gave a faint, bitter smile and got up.

" Gentlemen, let us go to the President of the Republic."

There followed the ritual ending of a Ministry at the Elysée. M. Albert Lebrun begged the Ministers to "*expédite the affairs of the moment*," which meant that they retained provisionally the use of their ministerial chairs, but no longer wielded any kind of authority.

Then, face to face, M. Lebrun and M. Daladier examined the situation. The President asked M. Daladier if he

would agree to reconstruct the Cabinet, seeing that that had been his intention prior to the secret session. M. Daladier was embittered and overworked. He refused categorically and suggested that Herriot might be able to effect a union of the parties. M. Lebrun consulted the Speakers of the two Houses. The Speaker of the Senate formally proposed M. Reynaud. The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies began by ruling himself out and declining the offer of the President of the Republic. He admitted that, although his position had been weakened, M. Daladier might again be invited to form a new Ministry, since he had not really been defeated, but he indicated his preference for giving M. Paul Reynaud a trial. Early in the afternoon the President of the Republic sent for M. Daladier again. The latter was less obdurate than at eleven o'clock in the morning. He still fought shy of the proposal, but allowed it to be understood that he wanted a few hours in which to think the matter over. M. Lebrun was about to grant the request, but M. Magre, the Secretary to the Presidency, entered and joined in the conversation. In his opinion the crisis must not be dragged on by a prolonged delay. "The country is waiting! We are at war. It must be either yes or no."

M. Lebrun said to M. Daladier: "Is it yes?" And M. Daladier answered: "It is no!"

He took his departure and M. Magre went to fetch M. Reynaud.

According to the classic formula of the note which flashed, a few minutes later, over the telegraph wires: "The President of the Republic has invited M. Reynaud to form the new Cabinet."

The chariot of State was turning off on to a different road. Where would it lead?

## Chapter XV

### Dramatic Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet

"LE JOUR DE GLOIRE EST ARRIVÉ"—CAREER AND CHARACTER OF M. PAUL REYNAUD—VISITS AND CONSULTATIONS—M. PAUL REYNAUD AND M. DALADIER FACE TO FACE—THE CONVERSATION AS IT OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN AND AS IT WAS—FROM MISTAKE TO MISTAKE—M. MANDEL REFUSES THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR—INTERVIEW BETWEEN DALADIER AND MANDEL—REYNAUD SEES LÉON BLUM—MARIN EXCLUDED—THE CASE OF GUY LA CHAMBRE—M. ROY, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR—THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC GROWS IMPATIENT—THE "HINGE" GROUP OVERLOOKED—RAGE OF M. GEORGES BONNET AT BEING DROPPED FROM THE CABINET—THE MINISTERIAL STATEMENT OF POLICY—IN PARLIAMENT THE UNEASY ATMOSPHERE OF GREAT CRISES—M. REYNAUD'S ILLUSION—M. LÉON BLUM SAVES M. REYNAUD—THE SINGLE VOTE—WILL THE RADICAL MINISTERS RESIGN?  
—THEY DECIDE TO STAY

"THE day of glory has come!" Such was the thought that could be read on the face of M. Paul Reynaud when, emerging from the Elysée on the afternoon of March 20th, he said to the journalists in a tone of only apparent unconcern: "The President of the Republic has commissioned me to form the Government."

He had long desired that moment, more than sixty years according to a subsequent sarcastic remark of M. Pierre Laval, who had no great love for him. But it was since his reappointment to the Ministry of Finance in



the autumn of 1938, and especially since the outbreak of war that his yearning had assumed strength and substance. Admittedly, his rivalry with M. Daladier had physical and intellectual causes, to which I have drawn attention but I wonder now if it had not been aggravated by the fear lest M. Daladier's popularity should present an impassable barrier to his accession to power. So on this day when the President of the Republic crowned an ambition which had been gnawing at him in impatience and resentment, he felt himself gain in stature, he saw himself at the summit and strained upwards—there is no doubting it—to attain that glory, towards which his hands were so eagerly stretching, the glory of winning the war, of gaining the victory, of being the man in whose honour marble statues would bear the words: "He deserved well of his country!" and whose name would resound down the ages like those of Clemenceau, Joffre and Foch. And who could blame him for so noble an exaltation, even though it involved him in serious blunders, beneath which he was to be all but crushed?

When fortune called him to great destiny, he was Finance Minister who had succeeded in restoring the confidence of savers and in causing money exported by the capitalists to return to France. He was given credit for this, though not popularity, which the heavy taxes imposed on his responsibility, rendered impossible. It was not forgotten that he had travelled widely, that his horizon was far from limited and that he had been held in esteem in London, New York and even formerly, in Berlin, when he pleaded in the Chamber of Deputies after the War for the creation of Franco-German economic and financial agreements. It was recalled that he had interested himself in military matters and, some years back now, had with much spirit developed before the House a programme for motorised divisions. He had been listened to and applauded as a lecturer who delighted in the play of ideas and who could read with art a text th

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 191

was artistically written. Lecturer, that indeed was the word hurled at him when people wished to belittle him: this word, sufficiently flattering to constitute a courtesy tribute, saved the necessity of following him in his occasionally unforeseen evolutions. For that matter, he was in no sense an orator. He did not carry his hearers away. They admired his formulæ that hit the target, just as they would appreciate the skill of a marksman who scores a bull, but they were mistrustful of them. His style was sometimes powerful but without warmth, and the tone of his voice which stressed the words sought to master, not to charm. Critics went to the length of saying that he liked to challenge, if only to show his mettle. He threw out his chest, as it were, morally as well as physically. He was, indeed, fond of sport, devoted to walking, cycling and swimming and rather advertised the fact. It was known that his Right convictions, which at the beginning of his career had been ardent to the point of bias, did not prevent him from being on excellent terms with leaders of the extreme Left. His friendship for Léon Blum was common knowledge. In 1937, when the Socialist leader formed his second and ephemeral Government after the Anschluss, he endeavoured, having come to an agreement with M. Paul Reynaud, to bring into being a Ministry of "*National unanimity around the Popular Front*," but M. Reynaud was obliged to withdraw his support in face of the vehement protests of all the Conservative elements in Parliament. Among the general public he passed for being a "no compromise man," resolved to carry on the war to a finish no matter what its vicissitudes might be. In political circles and in drawing-rooms this reputation had been slightly impaired owing to certain imprudences of language uttered in periods of bitterness or discouragement. He was reproached, for instance, with having—and that in the intimacy of the Council of Ministers—made remarks which the most thorough-going defeatists might have claimed as their own. To come

down to details, it was said that at the beginning of March he had been so gloomy in his views on the war, going so far as to predict an empty treasury by November, that M. Daladier was supposed to have upbraided him with the words: "Why not have done with it and say we must send a delegation to Hitler and make peace?"

To which Reynaud had replied in defence: "You have misinterpreted my theories and criticisms."

In my presence he protested with a good faith beyond suspicion: "It's my wish," he said, and would say to me again, "that we should put our backs into the war. I want to see it carried on a hundred per cent. I want to see all our energies devoted to this sole object—victory!"

In addition, when he set about constructing his Cabinet, he had reassumed all his old air of "no-compromise." So it was not the least cause of stupefaction to those in the know, as it will not be the least subject of study for the historians of to-morrow, to see M. Paul Reynaud reach the scene of action, as it were booted, helmed and armoured, and with a programme worthy of Clemenceau, yet accompanied by a bodyguard which was the very centre of incredible defeatist and pacifist intrigues. But let us not anticipate.

On leaving the Elysée, M. Paul Reynaud conformed with the customary rites. He owed a visit of consultation and deference, prescribed by etiquette, to the Speakers of the two Houses. In fact, he owed it to them doubly since, in their interview with the President, they had given him their support. Both encouraged him while at the same time, according to custom, they whispered into his ear some ban on an enemy who must be headed off or some recommendation in favour of a client who should be kept in office or found a place. But these were the merest preliminaries. M. Herriot was anxious that M. Jullien, his colleague of the Department of the Rhône, should retain his position. Fortunate M. Jullien, illustrious

unknown! M. Jeanneney suggested trying M. Frossard at the Ministry of Information.

Next he had to go and beard his predecessor—it was the correct thing to do—and also ask for his support. If he had heeded the promptings of his heart alone, he would have wished, for many reasons, to meet with a refusal on entering M. Daladier's study at the Ministry of War. I have already noted, for the sake of clarity, the total inability of M. Reynaud and M. Daladier to understand one another, still less to come to terms. Collaboration, difficult enough when M. Daladier was Premier, would therefore be even more so now that the roles were reversed.

Moreover, above all things, M. Reynaud was anxious to assume the effective direction of national defence. Would M. Daladier agree to yield it to him and himself go to the Quai d'Orsay? He had his doubts about that! M. Daladier's refusal to participate in the Government would simplify the problem but it would simplify it too much. It would probably entail M. Reynaud's resignation of the mandate entrusted to him by M. Lebrun. Alternatively, if M. Reynaud went ahead there might well be a disaster on the very first day of presentation before the House, as, in point of fact, there very nearly was!

M. Reynaud had no political base of his own on which to build. Formerly he belonged to the Republican Democratic Alliance presided over by M. P. E. Flandin, which was less a party with deep roots in the country than a kind of mutual assistance society for politicians who considered themselves eligible for ministerial rank. But he no longer belonged to it and between him and M. Flandin, despite attempts at compromise, there was a constant conflict of ambition.

The Republican Federation (Right constitutional) ought to have been one of his supports, but for a long time past there had been a complete breach between him and M. Marin. He stood alone, an independent who had friends, but not many. He would have the support of the Socialists,

to whom he would certainly offer a share in the executive power, but if the Radical party of which M. Daladier was still the head refused or was sparing of its support, he would have but a slight chance of succeeding, since he did not wield sufficient power to break the Parliamentary mould, as a Clemenceau or a Briand had done in earlier and now vanished days.

So we have M. Reynaud and M. Daladier face to face. Obviously I was not present at the interview, but it is easy for me to reconstruct it, in its spirit, if not in its exact terms, thanks to what I learned from the two principals and their confidants, and from what I know of their characters and methods.

To begin with, I can certify that M. Reynaud did not do what he should have done, for when I had occasion to say to him later: "You ought to have done that," he exclaimed: "Yes, that's true! But what do you expect? I'm no hand at finesse." M. Frossard expressed the same thing in different terms when he remarked: "Reynaud is not a political animal!"

It was M. Daladier who, by bringing him into his Cabinet, had, so to speak, cleared M. Reynaud from the Customs and drawn him from his Parliamentary isolation. It was M. Daladier who later, in rather piquant circumstances, well known to me but of no interest now, had effected M. Reynaud's interchange of office with M. Marchandeu, by which he went from the Ministry of Justice to that of Finance, where he had definitely succeeded in bringing himself to favourable notice. It was therefore, I say, greatly to M. Reynaud's interest to adopt a conciliatory tone. He might have said to M. Daladier:

"My dear Prime Minister, just now you refused the suggestion made by M. Lebrun that you should reconstruct your Cabinet. Possibly you yielded to a first impulse of anger. It must now have abated. Would you like to talk over the situation with me? We have had clashes in the

past. Let us put them out of our minds. What is the matter before us? To win the war. You have a potential store of popularity in the country which is as yet scarcely broached. I have not. You have the solid support of a party, most of the members of which, despite a small rebellious faction, recognise themselves in you. I have no such support. But I believe I have something: ideas, courage, will. If you do not grant me your support, I risk failure! That would be to the detriment of our country, which you wish to save as much as I do. If you give me no more than perfunctory or limited support I shall be paralysed, and that would mean much time and effort wasted, whilst Hitler will not have wasted his.

"Reconsider your refusal. If the vote of the Chamber had been less equivocal you would not have resigned, you would have proceeded with the Cabinet changes which, I have been assured, you were intending to make. You would have formed the great War Ministry which I consider necessary. Do it, and I will go to the Elysée to tell M. Lebrun that I renounce the mandate he entrusted to me and that you alone shall carry it out. Then I shall be at your disposal to help you, in a post of combat, to galvanise the energies of France."

To think and say that would not have been to finesse. It would have been to play the great and truly patriotic game. What would have happened? Either M. Daladier would have yielded to M. Paul Reynaud's arguments or he would have persisted in his determination to go into semi-retirement. In the first case the story of these advances would have struck an exceptionally sympathetic chord among the public and in political circles. The ice would have been broken between the two men. M. Daladier would have been compelled to entrust to M. Reynaud either the Foreign Office or the Ministry of War despite his own reluctance to give it up, for in an intimate conversation Paul would have been able to demonstrate to his leader, with documentary evidence in support, the

necessity of immediately remedying the shortcomings in military administration and errors in the High Command.

By the other theory, M. Daladier, who is a sentimentalist, would have been grateful to M. Paul Reynaud for so gracious a gesture. He would have given him unconditional support and perhaps ceded to him the Ministry of War from which M. Reynaud was so firmly resolved to dislodge him. In any case he would have used his authority in the Radical party to calm the storm which on the morrow and for several days was to threaten to submerge M. Paul Reynaud's ministerial staff.

The Reynaud-Daladier interview was very different from the one I have just pictured in imagination. M. Daladier's face was at its most expressionless: firmly settled in his arm-chair behind his desk, he awaited his visitor's words.

There is nothing like a chilly silence to disturb the most resolute self-confidence. It deprived M. Paul Reynaud of some of his resources, which he can only fully command when he can move to and fro and even spin round, as is his habit in his own office.

It was almost with awkwardness that he solicited M. Daladier's co-operation. "Why?" the latter objected. He had had that stupid riding-accident. He was tired: he had been overworking for years. That had been quite apparent at recent secret sessions when he had not been at his best, whereas he ought to have surpassed himself. He needed a rest-cure. M. Reynaud protested. Certainly it was understandable that M. Daladier should need rest, but he could have it without leaving the Government, whereas if he were absent it would be regarded as a declaration of war against his successor. He, Reynaud, would be prevented from trying his luck. The public would not understand.

M. Daladier filled his pipe, while observing his companion whose argument was better than plausible. It was true. With the single word: "No!" he could cut short

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 197

M. Reynaud's flight towards the heights. But wasn't that a great responsibility? He hesitated and M. Reynaud made known his intention of calling upon the Socialists.

"Blum!"

No. He would have to take Paul Faure, and the moderates in the Chamber would rise in protest—it was still too soon.

But he would offer them six ministerial posts or under-secretaryships. It was his purpose to create a War Cabinet inside the Ministry.

"What about the Interior?"

"Mandel."

"Ah! Has he accepted?"

"I haven't had time to offer him the position. I wanted to make sure of your acceptance first. I beg you to agree to retain the direction of Foreign Affairs."

M. Daladier frowned and shook his head.

"You refuse?"

"I was intending, if I had been able to refashion my Cabinet, to rid myself of the Foreign Affairs portfolio, so as to be able to devote myself wholly to national defence. My opinion has not changed. Whom do you propose then to put at the War Ministry?"

"Myself. In war-time the Premier must be at the War Ministry."

"I understand your point of view and I do not question it. You will easily find someone else for the Quai d'Orsay. Chaunteps is longing for the job."

M. Paul Reynaud felt as though his ministerial chair was tipping over. If he did not immediately fall in with M. Daladier's conditions by keeping him at the Ministry of War and National Defence, his whole card-house would collapse. At once he changed into reverse. Very well! He would be the one to go to the Quai d'Orsay and he told M. Daladier that he would efface himself to meet his wishes. Thus both were caught.



M. Reynaud, reckoning on wrestling the War Ministry from him, had not succeeded. M. Daladier, by refusing the Foreign Office, had seen a way of giving himself plenty of room for action. He, likewise, had failed, and there were the pair of them bound together for a while. Neither would forgive the other for it.

Wishing him good luck in the doorway of his study, M. Daladier did not believe that it would last long, while M. Reynaud, descending the stairway of the Ministry, was already pondering the means he would employ in forcing M. Daladier to change places with him.

But time was precious. A turbulent wind was beginning to disturb the Parliamentary lobbies, whilst the public was wondering what was happening, for nothing had prepared them for reading the newspaper headline: "Resignation of M. Daladier."

"You must move fast to forestall all the traps," intimated advisers of M. Reynaud whose impatience did not need stimulating. Their counsel was so pressing and effective that the unhappy man went from one mistake to another. Admittedly a Statesman should not concern himself overmuch with personal or partisan considerations, especially in time of war. All the same it is not helpful to occasion grounds for hostility without solid reasons. There are difficulties enough to get round without making more for oneself.

He had barely left the presence of the President of the Republic and not even seen M. Jeanneney, Herriot and Daladier before he sent word to M. Georges Mandel to stand by. He was anxious—and in this he was ten times right—to assure himself of the energy and skill of the former collaborator of M. Clemenceau. If he had never had other ideas and counsellors than of that kind, he would have spared himself many imprudences. In his own mind M. Reynaud had decided to charge M. Mandel with the office of Minister of the Interior. He said to himself: "With Mandel at the Ministry of the Interior and myself

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 199

as Premier, we shall be able to govern, especially when I have got the War Ministry as well."

Logically, nothing was more just. But there were facts and atmosphere and many factors which he did not take into account. M. Mandel has, so to speak, sensitive feelers. Already he had weighed the situation and he refused the Ministry of the Interior, for which he had been yearning, perhaps for years, and for which he knew himself almost predestined.

"No," he answered. "I can serve you better in the shadow."

"You're withholding your support?" demanded M. Reynaud, who is not given to circumlocution.

"No, my dear friend. But some weeks ago when M. Daladier accused us of plotting together against him, I had, as you know, an explanation with him and formally declared that, for the moment, I wanted but one thing, to remain at the Colonial Office to finish the work of Colonial recruiting which I had begun. If, this evening, I were to agree to be your Minister of the Interior, to-morrow a campaign would start against you because of this choice and you would be swept out of office. Why, Daladier, of whose support you tell me you are not absolutely certain, might find in my appointment a pretext for withdrawing it.

"Do not forget that your political origin is on the Right. You need therefore at the Ministry of the Interior, which the Radical party has always regarded as its fief, a genuine dyed-in-the-wool Radical who will cover you against the furious attacks and sly manoeuvres which are being prepared."

"Being prepared!"

"Of course, my dear friend. Why, whom have you got in the Senate and the Chamber to keep you informed?"

M. Paul Reynaud would not admit defeat. He asked Herriot to intervene with Mandel. M. Herriot was more than a Radical. He was something like the spiritual father of Radicalism. If Herriot sponsored Mandel for the

Ministry of the Interior, Mandel's objections would fall to the ground and the irregulars of Radicalism would think twice about sniping at the man for whom the Pope of the party had answered.

M. Herriot revels in this kind of arbitration in which the rhetoric of the two theses has to be nicely balanced. I should have very much liked to be present, if only *de auditu*, at the Herriot-Mandel scene and also at the little meeting which took place afterwards in M. Daladier's study. M. Herriot gave his apostolic blessing to M. Mandel but with infinite humility the Minister for the Colonies declined it. All the same Herriot was so pressing, also M. Reynaud for the second time, that he took refuge behind the judgment of King Solomon, in other words, of M. Daladier.

For sheer astuteness this step would not be easy to beat, for if M. Mandel, once appointed to the Interior, had been able to say next day: "I only accepted this position, which by divine right of the Radical Republic belongs to a Radical, at the instance of the Grand Lama of Radicalism and with the authorisation of M. Daladier who is himself the present President of the Radical Party!"—if he had been able to say this, both the Ministry and M. Mandel would have been taboo. Hands off!

But M. Daladier is a wily bird. When M. Mandel made the situation plain, he scented the advantage which would accrue to M. Reynaud from the Radical enthroning of M. Mandel at the Ministry of the Interior. He recollected, too, that, when he was examining the possibilities of a Cabinet reshuffle two days before his fall, he had said aloud before witnesses: "Suppose I put Mandel at the Interior?" Then he had asked: "What do you think of it?" and the answer had been: "*Do not hesitate!* We are at war. The public weal comes first!"

The two men studied one another.

"What would you like to do?" M. Daladier asked.

"To stay at the Colonial Office, as I told you at our last interview."

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 201

"Doesn't the Interior tempt you?"

"With a Radical Premier! Otherwise it would take all my strength and time to defend myself against the Radicals."

M. Daladier had to smile and must have said to himself *in petto* that this fellow might well be the Minister of the Interior of his dreams in war time. He decided to keep him in reserve for himself, in case the Reynaud experiment was brief.

"You're right," he said. "Stay at the Colonial Office. Let Reynaud apply to a Radical!"

Before this case of conscience was solved, M. Reynaud was battling with other problems. In the night of March 20th-21st, after his first interview with M. Mandel, he joined M. Léon Blum. They had a liking for one another. Anyone who has approached M. Blum and had intellectual dealings with him cannot, while making all reserves about the Party man and the leader of the S.F.I.O., but have a weakness for this mind, delicate, subtle, acute, broad in outlook, a mind which plays with argument as deftly as a juggler with balls. It is impossible not to respond to his charming sensibility, even if one has to regret its occasional disappearance behind the exigencies of Socialist doctrine and action!

M. Léon Blum appreciates originality. Apart from the friendship which had grown up between them, he certainly took pleasure in seeing in action a man like M. Paul Reynaud who could not be classified as a recognised type and whose qualities, failings and faults were so closely dovetailed as to provide almost always food for amazement or controversy.

When on this—for him—historic night M. Paul Reynaud saw M. Blum, he was a trifle embarrassed, amicably, I should say, rather than sentimentally, for the latter word implies a quality of heart with which I cannot say that he has been endowed by the gods. Perhaps he has, but I have not experienced it. He came officially to M. Léon

Blum to offer the Party three ministerial portfolios and three Under-Secretaryships. He would have been more at his ease if he could have said: "And you, first of all, of course!"

But he said exactly the contrary. He told him that he was very unhappy as he would have liked to ask him, his friend, to collaborate in the work of saving the country—which was his programme—but that he could not do so. He would risk being overthrown the first day in the Chamber, or the second in the Senate.

M. Léon Blum took the blow without blinking. There was no more than a faint movement of the eye-lids behind the spectacles. He asked Paul Reynaud what men he intended to take. He agreed with some of the choices and did not wince at the others. At mention of Louis Marin he had the instinctive reaction which he had controlled just before, and broke in:

"But Marin would be my opposite!"

Paul Reynaud did not allow him to continue. Léon Blum could be easy in his mind on that score. Marin would not be a member of the Government. The rule of "opposites" and the proprieties of friendship would alike be respected. They talked over the names of the Socialists to be chosen, on which subject Léon Blum would have to come to an understanding with Paul Faure. M. Léon Blum had a soft spot for M. Monnet, who had been his collaborator in two Governments. M. Reynaud proposed to make him Minister of Blockade with a seat in the War Cabinet, for the Socialists demanded representation in it. There was one name which was to do the new Ministry much harm in public opinion, that of M. Blancho, whom M. Léon Blum recommended as a realist particularly well informed of the needs of the working class. But the public would elect to remember only his escapade in the courtyard of some arsenal or other where, standing beside an admiral, he had been received with the singing of the Internationale. It was not so much this fact in itself as the period (1936-37) that he symbolised, which was disadvantageous.

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 203

M. Paul Reynaud was not yet at the end of his difficulties. He was solidly buttressed on his left by the Socialists. He would have to manoeuvre closely for the centre and the right. Pending an interview with M. Marin, fixed for the next day, he drew up plans, wrote names on lists and scratched some of them out. He had, as was quite natural, likes and dislikes. The first name crossed out was that of M. Guy La Chambre, Air Minister and personal friend of M. Daladier. The satisfying of a drawing-room grudge was behind this step. Unknown to the public at large, M. Guy La Chambre had had a quarrel with a Senator who moved in the best society. M. Reynaud had, as we have seen, no sense of fine shades of meaning or behaviour. He ruled out Guy La Chambre, replacing him by one of the latter's most deadly opponents, and made the Senator an Under-Secretary of State.

Someone said to him : " Guy La Chambre is M. Daladier's personal friend. Look out ! Things are not going too smoothly between you and your predecessor ! "

" I read the list of probables to Daladier over the telephone. He made no objection."

" That doesn't mean that he didn't think of any ! "

" Oh ! My mind's made up."

Undoubtedly M. Paul Reynaud was quite within his rights in acting thus, so I only pin down this trifling fact because, when added to many others, it constituted a whole which would bring about an explosion—as we shall see.

Little personal causes play a larger part in the history of men than is commonly believed.

From early morning on March 21st M. Paul Reynaud was wrestling with difficulties. He needed moderates on his side and would not hear of P. E. Flandin. Marin ? He excluded him since he had not got Blum. He sent for him and tried to induce him to sacrifice himself, but he was not cut out for such work. He did not know how to set about it. He roused opposition in those he wished to convince. The mere sight of M. Marin emerging from the Cabinet room

was sufficient to show that this was no friend nor a man well content who was leaving. He would find substitutes, but it was Marin who would issue a ban on the new Cabinet in the Chamber next day.

The question of the Ministry of the Interior was a thorny one. Since Mandel stood aside, who was it to be? Paul Reynaud appealed to his old colleague, Campinchi, who was anxious to remain at the Ministry of Marine. In the Minister's ante-room, black with journalists, photographers, principal- and under-private secretaries, former and future ministers, there was a constant going and coming of politicians to whom offers accepted or rejected were made, or who were ousted or presented with a mere buttonhole, that is a promise of something—later.

In the rooms adjoining the Minister's, hubbub prevailed. There was Frossard who would at last hold the office of Minister of Information which he had filled for no more than a few days in the second Blum Cabinet, without then having the smallest of small administrations to direct, lacking credits, officials and, for all I know, even paper with an official heading! He was growing impatient, for if this went on, everything might crack. At last! A smiling face, a worthy Senator, cheerful, convivial, almost a Bohemian, who bore a name predestined to high office—Roy. With a name as reactionary as that, could he be a Radical? Yes! And perhaps a freemason!

With that Paul Reynaud was saved. He had his Minister of the Interior. He had to clinch the matter quickly, for every ten minutes M. Magre, the Secretary-General of the Elysée, telephoned to say that the President of the Republic was getting impatient.

"Send him about his business," said M. Roy to M. Reynaud. "It is he who landed us in the mess we're in."

But M. Reynaud was careful to do nothing of the sort, and hastened to bring his task to an end. He put the finishing touches so speedily that he forgot the existence

of a celebrated group in the Chamber, known generally as the "hinge," for it was situated at the junction of the Conservative majorities with those of the Left. In Right Ministries the hinge formed the most advanced, that is to say, the Left. In Left Ministries it constituted the Right. Almost as soon as a Governmental crisis began one could witness the gambols of the President of the group, for it was very rare for him not to be called on to form part of the new combination. It was his turn!

Forget the "hinge"! What had the unhappy Paul Reynaud done? The President of the group made it quite plain to him the next day. This worthy was a solemn and pretentious creature who, on the pretext of having been a professor of law, specialised in long and soporific speeches. Because of the tinge of his hirsute covering he was always called "violet beard."

As its essential characteristic M. Paul Reynaud's Ministry counted within it six Socialists which assured it of about 150 votes on its extreme Left. A certain number of those who had been his colleagues in the Daladier Ministry disappeared. The most notable were M. Guy La Chambre, for reasons already given, M. Delbos, M. Gentin, M. Rucart and, above all, M. Georges Bonnet, who had but little anticipated such a thing. In fact, at sight of the list he could not believe his eyes!

What! He, who, solely for the personal benefit of M. Paul Reynaud, had just issued a decree shortening the delay in the automatic transformation of the separation of "bed and board" in divorce. He, who by his permanent conspiracy had co-operated so largely in the fall of M. Daladier and consequently in the accession of M. Reynaud, he to be left out! He would soon show M. Paul Reynaud what he could do! He would be the very soul of the vigorous campaign which throughout March 21st and 22nd would be launched against the Cabinet in the Chamber, and the like of which I have seldom seen in the forty years during which, from my seat



in the stalls, I have watched the entrances and exits of the great figures in French politics.

Is it true to say that M. Daladier encouraged it? M. Reynaud and his friends accused him of doing so. They were mistaken. If he had encouraged it, M. Paul Reynaud would have been in an even more grievous position. But he could not discourage it, for those of his party, whether friends or not, who hurled themselves into the fray were so enraged against M. Reynaud that even M. Daladier's personal intervention would have been violently thrust aside.

M. Chautemps, who had retained in the Reynaud Cabinet the same position of Vice-President of the Council that he had held under M. Daladier, pleaded for his new Chief just enough to appear to advantage in M. Reynaud's eyes, and with sufficient discretion not to be roughly handled by the Radicals on the war-path. M. de Monzie and M. Pomaret, who had likewise remained in the Government, did what they could, but they did not wield much authority. New-comers like M. Lamoureux and M. Frossard would have rather more. The latter knew how to "work the lobbies" but he was up against a powerful opposition. On the Right there was an equal fury, explained but not justified in its violence by the entry of the Socialists. When he learned the composition of the Cabinet, M. Pierre Laval exclaimed in the Senate: "Would you like me to overthrow it to-morrow? Or would you like them to stay in office over the Easter holiday?"

I should be greatly surprised if he had had no hand in the storm to which Paul Reynaud so nearly succumbed.

There was one man of rare delicacy, M. Delbos, former Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Blum and Chautemps Cabinets of 1936-37. Later, Minister of Public Instruction, he represented from the point of view of the war, the same tendency as M. Reynaud. The latter had sacrificed him to no purpose, thinking thereby to render

M. Georges Bonnet's eviction less painful to him, and also to give the Ministry of National Education to M. Sarraut whom he snatched away from the Ministry of the Interior. M. Delbos ought to have been even more embittered than M. A. Sarraut. Nothing of the kind! He made himself the champion of the new Government and would be one of those who saved it. Such gallant attitudes are not too frequent in political life.

On the evening of March 21st the usual augurs of great Parliamentary occasions prophesied a doubtful battle. It was not certain, they declared, that the Government would "make the grade." The Government had announced that it would present itself before the Houses on the very next day. It was a record for speed.

M. Reynaud assembled his colleagues on the morning of the 22nd to read them the Ministerial declaration of policy. It was short, firm, written with a pen of steel. "Good Reynaud stuff," was the description given by one Minister. I have learned that it had been drawn up by Colonel de Gaulle whom Paul Reynaud had summoned to Paris at the time when he had hopes of himself taking over the Ministry of War. Paul Reynaud asked if anybody had any observations to make. Only one was forthcoming, from M. Mandel, who said mischievously: "I think, my dear Prime Minister, that you have omitted something. You have not referred to the treachery of Russia. For you, more than for anyone else, that is necessary. I think I am justified in saying so, as I have been suspected as much or even more than yourself of being pro-Soviet."

There were smiles and general agreement. The atmosphere was somewhat chilly. It became icy when a brief discussion began about the possible incidents which might occur in the afternoon, and particularly about the agenda. There was good reason for raising the question, for the eddies disturbing the Radical waters gave rise to fears of disagreeable surprises.

Paul Reynaud addressed M. Daladier who, silent and expressionless, looked as though he were paying no attention to the discussions.

"*Mon cher Président*, which member of the Radical group do you think we could ask to table the vote of confidence, since M. Chichery, the President of the group, refuses to take the initiative in this matter?"

M. Daladier took his time, cogitated and murmured: "I don't know. . . ." Then he let fall two words: "Pierre Cot!"

They sounded like a death-knell. The fact was that Pierre Cot was one of the few members of the Radical group to have taken an immediate stand for the Government and particularly for M. Eynac, who was replacing Guy La Chambre.

In the Chamber prevailed the sense of unease that always accompanies great crises. A few moments before the sitting began the rumour spread, like a train of gunpowder, that the Radical-Socialist group had decided to abstain when it came to the vote of confidence. Within the group the struggle had been violent. Bonnet, Guy La Chambre and Marchandeau had been the most determined adversaries of the Government, and they had carried the day.

"That means the crash!" exclaimed an old habitué of the theatre of politics.

One man alone looked more or less untroubled. His composure would not last long. This was Paul Reynaud himself who, ever since the President of the Republic had entrusted him with "the mission of forming the new Cabinet," had been living in a starry dream. The decrees had appeared in the official Gazette. He was Prime Minister. Certainly there was a battle to be fought. But why should he not win it?

He walked up to the Ministerial benches. A neighbour whispered what was probably a bad piece of news in his ear. He replied like a champion: "We shall have some

sport ! ” In which he was wrong. It would not even be a fine tournament.

He read his declaration of policy, but less well than he usually read. He had every right to be tired. The two Radical speakers who began the assault were no thunderbolts, but they were severe on the Government, and even their bad arguments found support in a House favourably disposed towards criticism. They were particularly applauded when they claimed to be the interpreters of the opinion of the country, and declared that in their constituencies, from which they had just come, people could make nothing of M. Daladier's departure and were asking themselves what hidden influences had brought about the crisis.

M. Marin, who usually lost himself in long and diffuse explanations, spoke with trenchant clarity. He would vote against the Government, and his group with him. The circle was contracting around M. Paul Reynaud. He went up into the rostrum. He had lost much of his assurance. He had prepared—or rather there had been prepared for him, for how could he have had time to write or dictate it?—a speech which he read badly. The chiselled sentences were ineffective. What was needed was an appeal from the heart, a war-cry, a bugle-note, a clash of swords. Instead, he read a lecture which fell flat.

So bad was the impression that when he left the rostrum, applauded only by the Socialists, the most malicious of his opponents called for the proceedings to be closed without any reply being made to the Premier's speech. It was almost insolent. They seemed to be saying in effect: “The Government is doomed. Let's finish it off.”

Then a man stood up in his place. M. Léon Blum has a sense of Parliamentary drama. He understood that, short of a swing round, difficult to effect at that, the game was up with Reynaud and with his Government. He leaped into the water, almost literally, to such an extent

did one have the impression that he was striving to save a helpless man who, half-drowned, has given up swimming and is sinking beneath the waves.

At once M. Léon Blum attained the height of pathos. He appealed to the political conscience of the Radicals. He invoked the perils which threatened the country. He claimed the right of the working-class, which his party represented, to share in the defence of the nation. From different parts of the House he was interrupted, shouted down, but amid the clamour he cried aloud the collective duty of all to carry on the war and to win it.

He was moved, and he moved others. In face of the swelling babel which rose to drown his voice he experienced that fearful sensation of impotence to convince.

With his long arms moving in gestures of imploring appeal he looked like an Old Testament prophet. But his face became pale, his voice broke. . . . He staggered, but while he was fighting against faintness and succeeding in overcoming it, the Speaker, who was following his efforts with admiration, realised that the moment was tragic. He intervened to put the interrupters to shame. He recalled the sacred union of 1914 when Denys Cochin, the Catholic Royalist, and Jules Guesde, the theorist of collectivism, joined the same ministry of national defence.

M. Léon Blum recovered himself. From the point of view of the beauty of the scene it was a pity. For by argument he could not but lessen the worth of his initial outburst. Leaving aside all considerations of individuals, parties and cabals, he had just shown himself—as I told him when the sitting was suspended—the exasperated voice of the country.

But would the Government be saved? Or had we just heard no more than a dramatic elegy? In the inner corridors of the Palais Bourbon doubts were expressed. I met Frossard who was grieved and bitter. He accused Daladier who, by the way, had not come. He allowed the Government only 250 votes. In the hubbub of

conversation exchanged from group to group it was said that Reynaud would stay in office if the number of votes in favour of the Government exceeded by as little as one the number of abstentions and votes against. Someone walked through the hall of the four pillars: 249 votes in favour! That meant defeat, averred some. But the checking of votes dragged. Search was made for laggards. Repentant Communists, who had not been unseated, were made to vote. A few abstentionists were induced to come down on the Government side. The Government supporters vied with one another over who should be the one to find that solitary vote which M. Reynaud would consider sufficient to enable his craft to round this formidable headland.

Each of them afterwards gave himself the credit for it. Some days later Frossard was to appoint one of his friends—and why, after all, should not his name find a place in history?—President of some committee or other at the Ministry of Information. Frossard told me of it on the day of this appointment. “On the 22nd, when all seemed lost, I said to Déchizeaux who had abstained: ‘Change your vote. I will make it worth your while. I’m an honest man. I pay.’”

Léon Blum went by.

“To-day you were the voice of the country,” I said to him.

He was touched. We shook hands in silence. I believe now—and I had a presentiment of it then—that it would have been better if the Cabinet had been overthrown, for following these two days of crisis and after this sitting of the Chamber it was impossible to believe in Paul Reynaud as a great leader. But Léon Blum, who no more than I could know the future, had been right to speak out as he had done. For my part I shall never forget the emotion caused me by his words, his attitude and his action.

P. E. Flandin picked his way through the crowd of journalists. With the composure of the experienced

politician he whispered to me: "It would be better if he were not turned out to-day. We don't want the bridges cut with the Socialists."

The bell rang to indicate that the sitting was resumed. There was a majority of *one*. One? Would he remain in office? Watch him come in by the left-hand door. His eyes were sparkling. Look at Blum. His cheeks had lost their greenish look. He was exalted. Evidently Reynaud meant to stay!

All was not over, however. There was a majority of one! But three-quarters of the members of the Radical group had abstained. Could the Radical Ministers remain in the Cabinet? If they couldn't, if they resigned, there would be no Government left. A Cabinet Council met. "You would have thought," one Minister told me, "that it was a gathering of the family council in a dead man's bedroom."

The Radicals withdrew into a little room to deliberate separately. M. Daladier was hesitant. He regretted having given his support to M. Reynaud. M. Roy, M. Chautemps and M. Campinchi intervened on Reynaud's behalf. What counted was the number of votes for and against. The abstentions ought not to be taken into account. "But Daladier," one of the Ministers objected, "only had abstentionists against him the day before yesterday, and he resigned."

"He needn't have."

"But I did!" Daladier struck in.

"Of your own volition, as Reynaud might do this evening," declared M. Roy, Minister of the Interior. "But it's not for us to compel him to."

Addressing himself directly to M. Daladier, he added: "You have no right to resign. The President of the Republic offered you the opportunity to reconstruct your Government, so you ought to have accepted the offer or refused M. Reynaud your support. But you gave it and cannot withdraw it. If the Radical Group ask you to

## Beginning of the Paul Reynaud Cabinet 213

withdraw, the problem will be different. Then will be the time to examine it."

M. Daladier gave in. A few days later he said to me: "I was wrong. I ought not to have entered this Government. I was tired, worn out, I allowed myself to be persuaded. Then I ought to have left it on the evening of its presentation before the Chamber. I must get out of it at the first opportunity."

So it needed exceptional actions to prevent M. Reynaud being obliged to resign. The mere raising of M. Daladier's finger would have sufficed to make the new Ministry no more than a shadow. Still, despite obvious blunders, M. Paul Reynaud did not at that moment deserve such a fate. He had not yet put his fortunes to the test. To many people he appeared as a hope and a promise. He was not yet a disappointment. No one could tell that through the treachery of his own collaborators and intimates rather than as a result of his personal shortcomings he would be a public misfortune.



## Chapter XVI

### "I Shall Win the War"

M. PAUL REYNAUD'S FEVERISH ACTIVITY—WHO WILL BE SECRETARY TO THE WAR CABINET?—COLONEL DE GAULLE REFUSES AND M. BAUDOUIN IS APPOINTED—WHY IS M. BAUDOUIN, A KNOWN DEFEATIST, CHOSEN FOR A WAR CABINET?—M. PAUL REYNAUD'S "PRESUMPTION"—THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL OF MARCH 26TH—CONFLICT WITH M. DALADIER—RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MEN GROW BITTER—M. DALADIER THINKS OF LEAVING—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S WARNING TO THE NEUTRALS—TO THE RESCUE OF NORWAY, INVADED BY GERMANY—THE BATTLE FOR IRON—M. PAUL REYNAUD SAYS TO ME: "I SHALL WIN THE WAR"—THE EXPEDITION ABANDONED—M. REYNAUD'S ILLNESS—HE DRAWS UP A SCHEME FOR RE-FASHIONING HIS CABINET AND OTHERS PREPARE DIPLOMATIC MOVES FOR HIM—M. ALEXIS LÉGER, SECRETARY-GENERAL AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE, IS CONDEMNED BY MME. DE PORTES AND M. BAUDOUIN

SELDOM did a Government have a more difficult entry into office than M. Paul Reynaud's. No doubt one might recall that, following the General Election of June, 1914, a Ribot Ministry was overthrown on the very day of its presentation before Parliament. But who in the world remembers M. Ribot, notwithstanding that he was Minister of Finance and then Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in the course of the last war?

The same mishap befell M. Camille Chautemps about

ten years ago. But this was a trifle in comparison with the storm that surrounded the birth of Paul Reynaud's Cabinet.

The new leader gave evidence in the sequel to an undeniable power of resistance. Barely cast down when March 22nd came to an end after an inglorious combat, he had taken firm grip of himself by the morning of the twenty-third. He displayed a feverish activity. His friends persuaded him that, in order to make headway against the current of distrust, suspicion and hostility bearing down upon him, he must surprise and impress the public by immediate actions or at least by spectacular gestures. The advice was not of a kind to displease him. It made flattering appeal to his natural manner of behaviour. Even so, there was need to select the actions and gestures with care. If M. Daladier showed a prudence which sometimes allowed opportunities to slip by, M. Paul Reynaud was only too prone to grasp them all, even the bad ones.

If Daladier was over mistrustful of himself, M. Reynaud tended in the opposite direction. He did not distrust himself enough, one might say, not at all. Indeed, he had so much self-confidence that he allowed himself the luxury of the most extravagant challenge possible to the natural laws of equilibrium. Whilst he flattered himself, as he was to say one day in the Senate, on *thinking war*, and whilst on attaining power he really had the splendid arrogance of aspiring to be the man who would win the war, his household, his Cabinet and his ante-rooms quickly became the most active and dangerous cells in which defeatists of every kind were able to attack the nerve centres of the State. At the same time he urged the Minister of the Interior, the Director of National Security and the Prefect of Police to harry the traitors, Communists, suspects and propagandists of peace at any price. One might almost say that he experienced a sadistic pride in proving that he was, and would be, insensible to the

influence of his families and of his brain-trust, whose tendencies and observations he well knew.

He organised his official staff, he created a War Cabinet. But who would be the Secretary of this Cabinet, that is to say, who would prepare the work and the reports? Who would direct the instructions for the various Ministers in accordance with the decisions taken? Who would hasten and supervise their execution?

From the armies in the field he had transferred to Paris a senior officer of great distinction, who had been Secretary-General to the Committee of National Defence, and who at the moment was commanding a tank regiment. I have already mentioned him several times and shall have further occasion to speak of him. If M. Daladier had been willing to renounce the War Ministry in his favour, M. Reynaud intended to make this officer Director of his military Cabinet, or possibly something even more important. Now he offered him the post of Secretary to the War Cabinet. But Colonel de Gaulle, who would certainly have consented to be a stimulus and a guide by the Premier's side at the Ministry of War, feared—wherein, perhaps, he was wrong—that in the post offered to him by M. Paul Reynaud he might be nothing but a functionary lost in a welter of forms and documents. So he begged him to let him return to his tanks. M. Paul Reynaud had had a good inspiration in choosing Colonel de Gaulle. But as soon as he had had a good one he seemed to be condemned by some wicked fairy or other to have a bad one. This time, having had the best, he also had the worst.

He called for the collaboration of M. Baudouin. Would he have had recourse to him if Colonel de Gaulle had remained beside him at this date? However that may be, it was M. Baudouin whom he appointed Under Secretary of State and Secretary of the War Cabinet.

Why, when forming a war government, did he choose as his principal collaborator a man who had already made

up his mind to defeat, and who would never cease to answer : “ The end has come ” ? How did M. Reynaud take so great a fancy to him as to entrust to him the secret of all the great affairs of State ? Was it because, some months before, M. Baudouin had been M. Bonnet’s messenger to Count Ciano, and because he maintained constant relations with the Italian Foreign Minister, whom he met every time he went to Rome—and that was often ? Was it because in 1930 M. Baudouin had written in the *Revue de Paris* a study, the tendencies of which were exactly the opposite of M. Reynaud’s ? Was it because in expensively-got-up booklets reserved for the elect, and to which I shall have occasion to return, M. Baudouin had developed firstly a peace plan which revealed affection for Italy, indulgence towards Germany, and indifference towards England ; and then a scheme for the reorganising of the French State, wholly inspired by the Fascist idea and animated by a formidable personal ambition ? Was it for all these reasons combined, and also, or only, because M. Baudouin was *persona grata* with a feminine personality, with whom I shall certainly have to deal in order not to leave in obscurity an essential element in the influences which were brought to bear on M. Paul Reynaud ?

When he entered the arena, M. Paul Reynaud knew enough of the position to have caused anyone else to recoil, but he is one of those men, as he would prove later, whose qualities (though he has many) are less than their presumption. I have, I must confess, often pondered over the case of M. Reynaud. I could not analyse his errors satisfactorily until I had called to mind Richelieu’s judicious maxim : “ Presumption is one of the greatest vices that a man in public office can have.”

At the start I shared the confidence in him felt by many of my countrymen and their good wishes towards him, and retained some part of these feelings until the moment of his desertion at Bordeaux.

It was this same vice which did so much harm to André

Tardieu. But Tardieu made up for it by a personal dynamism, by something alive, gay, sensitive and human of which M. Paul Reynaud never had an ounce. Moreover, when great issues were at stake, Tardieu rose with a beat of the wing above his faults as though allowing only his qualities of greatness to soar. In short, if illness had not laid this exceptional man low, if he had been, like M. Reynaud, called to take the fate of France in his muscular hands, it is not a Baudouin that he would have chosen. Or if by chance there had been a Baudouin in his train, the Baudouin would have been the one to bend, not he. A Tardieu would not have allowed himself to be imposed upon by anyone, whoever he might be, and certainly not induced to capitulate even by General Weygand nor yet by Marshal Pétain, of whose limitations he was aware. He would have broken them like glass rather than sacrifice to their weakness the cause of the State, the cause of France.

But M. Paul Reynaud was not yet called upon to confront such grievous tests. It was now his task to disarm Parliamentary opposition, and he thought to do so by conquering public opinion, which was still very restive. He would neglect nothing, and would order that nothing should be neglected to achieve this purpose. Each of his acts would be trumpeted, sometimes too much, and he would undergo the counter-shock of excessive publicity.

This, I hasten to state, was not true of the meeting of the Supreme Council held on March 28th. As early as March 23rd, M. Léger, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sir Ronald Campbell, the British Ambassador in Paris, and M. Corbin, together with Lord Halifax, had once more raised the question of the declaration by which Great Britain and France pledged themselves not to negotiate a separate peace. M. Paul Reynaud himself flew to London, and the alliance was signed. That was a great act. I have described its conception. Now it was born, and M. Reynaud was right to celebrate it.

At the same Supreme Council a military proposal put forward by Mr. Chamberlain and his British colleagues was approved by M. Reynaud. I will say nothing further about it, because it was kept secret. M. Daladier, who was to have accompanied M. Reynaud to London, cried off at the last moment owing to a fresh crisis of pain due once again to the results of his accident. In the opinion of the malicious his real reason was a fit of sulkiness. Let us allow both reasons! That his sufferings were real and that he blessed them since they furnished him with a pretext for avoiding a distasteful journey in company with the man who had become his mortal enemy. The earlier incompatibility had degenerated into an implacable hostility which grew more relentless with every day: M. Reynaud having as his chief underlying motive the dislodging of M. Daladier from the Ministry of War, and M. Daladier being anxious to seize the first opportunity of regaining his liberty.

To the members of the War Committee\* M. Paul Reynaud amplified the British proposal for a military operation to be carried out in Germany. M. Reynaud explained that he had pledged his support of it. M. Daladier objected, recalling that in doing so he was only maintaining his point of view already expressed at an earlier meeting of the Supreme Council. He considered that operations of this kind should be ruled out until we were in a position to give a more than equal response to the reprisals in which the Germans would not fail to engage. Each member of the War Committee was called upon to give his opinion, and the sitting ended inconclusively. M. Daladier's opposition was the logical sequel to the military policy of lying low which had been his since the beginning of the war. But it was regarded differently in

\* The War Committee is not to be confused with the War Cabinet. The Cabinet is the meeting of certain members of the Government. The Committee is a legal institution consisting of certain ministers, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Admiral of the Fleet. It is presided over by the President of the Republic.

Governmental circles, where it was considered a preconceived determination to hamper everything that M. Paul Reynaud wished or might wish to attempt.

The consequence was that the relations between the two men, between their circles, and between the groups which ranged themselves behind them grew more and more bitter. Another result was a change in the position of those whose chief object was peace at any price. They had encouraged and helped the overthrow of M. Daladier by every means in their power. Now they drew closer to him and pretended to compromise him against M. Reynaud.

I met M. Piétri at an Embassy lunch. I had not seen him since the night when he had been so proud of contributing to M. Daladier's fall. He came up to me and said: "I think we were wrong to turn Daladier out."

"We?"

"I refer to our Parliamentarians."

M. Laval who, on March 19th, on the eve of what he called Daladier's execution had no words hard enough for him, was now exploiting the rancour of the ex-Premier against his successor. He, as well as M. Georges Bonnet, was all honey in his dealings with M. Daladier's friends, and asked nothing better than to enlist them in his chaser squadron.

M. Daladier, who had antennæ everywhere, smiled at these changes of front, and sought information.

"It seems that Laval takes a very firm line nowadays when he talks of Germany," he observed to a friend.

"Yes. He defends himself against any charge of showing the slightest sign of weakness."

M. Daladier cogitated. His gaze seemed to be trying to bore through an invisible screen.

"If that goes on," he said, "in three months we shall have a Laval Ministry."

"With you in it?" inquired the other. "He would

be quite prepared to have a talk to you and others as well."

M. Daladier's hand swept the air with a gesture of doubt and anxiety.

"Naturally! He's after something quite else. The months ahead, perhaps the days, will be black."

"All the more reason why you should stand fast and not allow yourself to be compromised!"

"No. I only want to clear out."

On M. Paul Reynaud's side committees of all sorts were formed. Meetings lost ministers and officials much time, but the brain-trust was active, and M. Baudouin wielded the conductor's baton.

Viewed from a distance, all this loses much of its interest. It was while this agitation, at once artificial and disturbing, was developing that a progressive stir was going on in Great Britain. Little by little Mr. Neville Chamberlain had suffered the wear and tear of events. It is not for a Frenchman like myself to discuss the internal reasons for it.

By way of contrast, the figure of "Winston," ever popular as the *enfant terrible* who did not mince his words, became ever more popular when his compatriots grasped the fact that for years they had failed to appreciate his prophetic exhortations to become alive to the formidable German danger: for months past he had been delighting the man in the street with the colourful and uncompromising admonitions that he addressed to neutrals who were waiting to be half devoured before begging to be snatched from the jaws of the crocodile!

He was still First Lord of the Admiralty when at the end of March he renewed his warnings. Towards the close of February he had shouted at them his famous heartfelt cry of: "I'm beginning to have enough of it!" This time his tone was more grave than satirical, for he knew, or had a foreboding, of the plot that was being hatched.

Scarcely had the British and French navies begun to



lay mines in Norwegian waters, in reply to their violation by German sailors, than the Government of the Reich gave the order for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. In Denmark the German troops received an immediate welcome, only a few individuals upholding the honour of their country's name. In Norway, however, they were to come up against a pride which was something more than outward show.

But the German Command had prepared its expedition with care. The "Fifth Column" had made sure of accomplices among the politicians, in the army and chiefly in the ports, where, directly the signal for the invasion proper was given, German soldiers, disguised until then as civilians or merchant seamen, threw off the mask and, under the eyes of the dazed Norwegians, seized certain key positions, in particular the port of Narvik, the outlet of the "iron route," and the port of Trondheim, the only one equipped for the landing of artillery. Thus forestalled, the Allies would have the heavy handicap of having to take those ports by force.

The object of Hitler's enterprise was twofold. Firstly, he aimed at loosening the grip of the Franco-British blockade which was endeavouring to cut the "iron route" to the disadvantage of Germany. Secondly, his purpose was to have the Norwegian coasts at his disposal for naval and aerial bases against the British Isles. The stake was therefore considerable, and the fact did not escape either Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Churchill, or M. Paul Reynaud and M. Daladier. Narvik! That had been one of the last ideas of M. Daladier's term of office. Why was no advantage taken of the violation of Norwegian waters by the *Altmark* to take precautions in the harbours of Narvik and Trondheim; there would be no occasion to raise the blockade of them! It was Mr. Churchill who declared that too many scruples did harm rather than honour. Would it be possible to make up the time, lost once again? The Governments of London and Paris set to work on

the problem with feverish activity. The Royal Navy added another glorious page to its golden book by destroying half the German Fleet. While paying homage to it, M. Paul Reynaud, in two successive declarations to the Chamber and the Senate, affirmed the determination of France and Great Britain to win the "iron battle"; whilst Mr. Winston Churchill described in the Commons the exploits of the minelayers, airmen, gunners and sailors.

I cannot here resist the admiring pleasure of enshrining a sentence worthy to figure in an anthology of the Admiralty:

*"The Admiralty,"* said Mr. Churchill, amid the intense emotion of the House, *"considered the operation (the first Battle of Narvik) so hazardous, that it informed the officer in command of the destroyers that the decision to attack or not should be left to him, and that his conduct would be approved whatever he did and whatever happened."*

The captain decided to attack. That is how great things are achieved! Four days after this first feat the port and waters of Narvik were the scene of a naval engagement, in the course of which seven German destroyers were sent to the bottom. I have not lost the memory of the immense hope that the news of this magnificent episode brought me.

In the course of this glorious week I had a conversation with M. Paul Reynaud. He had, perhaps, been too hasty in announcing that the "iron route" would be finally blocked to Hitler, but one could not be annoyed with him for forcing the note a little in order at the same time to raise the nation's morale. I asked him if the Norwegian campaign was continuing to develop favourably, as the latest news gave grounds for hoping. He did not conceal the existence of certain rather disquieting doubtful issues. He made some criticisms and referred to the previous day's meeting of the War Cabinet where—though I did not know this until later—he had once more been at odds with M. Daladier over the Commander-in-Chief, Gamelin, whom he planned to replace.

"Have you seen the War Minister?" he asked abruptly.

"Certainly I have."

"What does he say about the Head of the Government?"

I hedged: "He did not ask me what you say about the War Minister. There is only one thing which really matters to me," I went on. "That is that the war should be won by you, by Daladier, by someone else, but that it should be won."

We were both standing just then. He drew near me, so that our heads were almost touching, and with an energy, clearness and determination that I shall never forget, he said: "Win the war! Yes. Nothing but that must count. . . ."

"Nothing but that!"

"Well, my dear friend, I guarantee that I shall win the war. I shall win it! You understand! I shall win it!"

When I remember that brief scene, that emphatic cry: "I shall win the war, I shall win the war!"—and I do so often—and when I recall the rugged faith which hardened M. Paul Reynaud's face, I cannot help hating the people who extinguished that faith and enfeebled that determination.

There could be no better state of mind than M. Reynaud's at that time for confronting the difficulties which were about to arise.

The Norwegian affair developed the sense of action in him to its fullest extent. He had great hopes of it. He would be led to hope too much from it, for the slightest check might provoke a decline in his nerve. Now that is precisely what happened. The attempt to free Trondheim, where the Germans had been allowed to install themselves, did not succeed. There were many other ports where troops landed, but they had no quays and no anti-aircraft defence to counter enemy air attacks during the disembarkation. Trondheim alone was fully equipped. To hazard the whole fleet in order to clear it

without any certainty of success was a piece of madness which the Admiralty would not risk.

But did not the Admiralty make a mistake ? It decided to abandon the whole expedition except at Narvik. This was a bludgeon blow for Reynaud who had gambled on the success of the operations in Norway to restore the political situation in his favour. Gamelin, who at the start had been reticent, had taken matters in hand. Thirty-five thousand men were already equipped, on the way or ready to start. Reynaud sent him to London to ask the Admiralty and the British Government to re-examine the problem. The Generalissimo did not convince them, nor was a better result achieved by a somewhat virulent message to Mr. Chamberlain.

Without pausing to pick up his cuffs, as one of his collaborators put it, the French Premier asked by telephone that a meeting of the Supreme Council should be called. It was Saturday, April 27th. He left for London with M. Daladier, M. Campinchi and Admiral Darlan. The view presented in detail by the British representatives was as follows : it was all very well to despatch troops, the difficulty was to land them. Trondheim ? There it was almost impossible. Reynaud insisted, Daladier likewise. The members of the Government hesitated. On the French side there was a wish that a fresh attempt at least should be made. Stress was laid on the fact that abandonment of the enterprise would cause an enormous impression to our disadvantage in Italy, the Balkans, Russia, Turkey, in fact everywhere.

The communiqué issued by the Supreme Council disclosed nothing to those who were not informed of what was in the wind. To me the vagueness of the sentences and the reference to : “ *Various eventualities that might arise in the near future,* ” had a somewhat pessimistic ring. One could only deduce from it that something was in progress pending renunciation. Indeed the British Government agreed to study various solutions and General Gamelin

remained in London to go into them thoroughly with the English. But after examining them the Government informed the Generalissimo that, having weighed and reviewed every aspect of the matter, they could only concur with the opinion of the Admiralty. Nor did any fresh and even excessive efforts on the part of M. Reynaud cause any change in their attitude.

One member of the Government, having ascertained from questions I had put that I was fully informed of the issue, said to me: "*I quite understand the Admiralty's opinion. They dare not risk the whole navy which is the safeguard of the Empire and which, moreover, will be needed in other than Norwegian waters. This is just a hazard of war. There will be others.*"

As I expressed astonishment that French and British, who certainly ought to know all about the indentations of the Norwegian coast did not arrange matters so that the ports of Narvik and Trondheim could be occupied by them in one swoop before the Germans had settled themselves there, my companion answered: "*If you're going to count up the instances of unpreparedness, you'll have to go a long way further back!*"

But the sequel!

What is so horribly sad about these events and about the solutions sought for to counter them is that nothing can be studied as a simple function of the international problem, because internal or personal matters come to cut across and complicate it. M. Daladier had a grievous experience of this over Finland. Over Norway M. Reynaud had one at least as painful.

He returned from London the more depressed for having expended a great deal of nervous energy. Back in Paris he was persuaded to convoke the Chamber and stake everything. "I will lay the whole situation before them and they shall decide."

But he was compelled to take to his bed. He had influenza and was running a high temperature. He

developed a slight congestion of the lungs. The news from London and the news of his illness filtered through. Political adversaries are not considerate even in war time. They had not been towards M. Daladier, they would not be towards M. Reynaud either. Both alike were fair game. They made ready to shake him all the more severely because for some days he had appeared to be triumphant. He was a prey to alternate fits of courage and dejection. For a little while his illness, which was serious, stood him in good stead. It debarred him from public acts, speeches and conversations in which his lack of political sense might have involved him in ill-advised words and gestures. The tempest stopped short at his threshold.

Whilst on the other side of the Channel it beat furiously upon Mr. Chamberlain's Ministry, which was shaken by it, Paul Reynaud was able to profit by the fact that the British Premier had felt the worst force of the storm.

He gave up the idea of summoning Parliament as his brain-trust had advised. When the two Houses re-assembled in the ordinary way on May 16th, the date that they had fixed, the effect of stupor and anger would, he calculated, have been dulled.

God knows it would be ! But not in the way people believed at the end of April and the beginning of May. In the meanwhile his concern was to divert public attention and discontent against others. Who, first of all, was responsible for this Norwegian affair ? Had it succeeded, it would have been he. As it had failed it was someone else. It was not he who had proposed it, but Daladier. He had only inherited it. No doubt he took to himself the British victories on the sea and at Narvik, and did not recall in this connection that M. Daladier and his colleagues were at the origin of the enterprise. It was a good measure of war, but since it had turned out badly, let us go back to the source. Right ! And let a good, well-documented *dossier* prove what it was requisite to prove.

“ Certainly ! ” came the answer from M. Daladier's study

in the Rue St. Dominique, into which penetrated echoes from the room hard by where M. Paul Reynaud at his home in the Place du Palais Bourbon talked, listened, discussed and foretold.

"Certainly!" But M. Daladier is not a madman who swaggers, lets off fireworks and brags. Under any conditions, and especially after the Finnish lesson, he would not have climbed daily to the roof top, to call upon the people to admire him.

"Oyez! I have destroyed the German fleet, I have blocked the 'iron-route,' I am winning the battle for iron!"

When he advised the President of the Republic to entrust the Government to M. Herriot, M. Daladier had said: "Do not take Reynaud. His vaingloriousness verges on mania. As long as it's only a matter of the budget, of bank notes, it will be all right: but in war it would be disastrous."

And a muffled voice, afraid of the anguished foreboding it expressed, let fall the words: "If Reynaud stays another two months . . . look at him, he has the sign of cruel fatality upon him. He will be the one to make peace with the Germans. M. Daladier was saying so to Laval the other day."

"Oh! They've seen each other?"

"Yes. They had a mutual explanation. Laval has his Italian and Spanish bee in his bonnet, but he's not on the side of the Germans."

"Hm! There's not much proof of that."

From the Place du Palais Bourbon were some of the remarks exchanged between two doors in the Rue Saint Dominique overheard? It's quite possible. There were a few scatterbrains plying between the two places who took it upon themselves to hand on what ought not to be handed on. There was one especially who had in his favour only the bearing of a great name. He was nothing but a *minus habens*, whose mistakes aroused as much laughter as his pretensions, but the tittle-tattle remained.

In addition M. Reynaud, who had not renounced—far from it—his determination to take over the Ministry of National Defence, was devising a plan for a ministerial reshuffle which would enable him to dislodge Daladier from the Rue Saint Dominique, and to strengthen his team on the Right by Marin, if possible, and on the Left by the entry of certain Radicals already foreshadowed. He would call upon Daladier to say yes or no: either a Ministry of State or the Foreign Office.

But the difficulty does not lie in saying what one will do, it lies in doing it. How could Daladier be brought to fall in with the suggestion? If he did not consent, could he ride roughshod over him?

" Why not? " suggested M. Baudouin who was thinking that, if M. Daladier went to the Quai d'Orsay, the post he coveted would no longer be free.

M. Reynaud, presumptuous though he was, preferred to avoid the risk of Daladier's departure altogether. A man of experience, to whom he talked freely of his purpose, said: " M. Daladier is on the look out for an opportunity to abandon the Government ship. If you ask him to change with you, he will seize the chance to leave. Make no doubt of that." M. Reynaud pondered and decided to wait. He thought over, and others suggested, projects, alike in that they were all intended to strike the imagination of the public.

The first was to change the Commander-in-Chief. I have already said that, rightly or wrongly, this idea had been long rooted in his mind. It was strengthened by the opinions of prominent military men of his acquaintance. As far back as April 12th, at a sitting of the War Cabinet, he delivered a first attack on General Gamelin, which, contrary to expectations, M. Daladier, who thought that the criticisms made against the general were really directed against him, had checked without ceremony. Now it was a question of returning to the charge with a better chance of success.



There was one operation which tempted him all the more because it was called for from various quarters, for different reasons which, however, converged towards the same result. It would consist in embarking on a great diplomatic movement. That it would be justified in the case of many capitals where France was poorly represented there is no doubt. The difficulties began when it came to the question of choosing. There were many candidates who would be worse than the victims marked down for replacement. Who would be appointed to Berne where the holder of the position had reached the age limit? M. Daladier had offered it to M. Patenotre, a deputy and former minister, who by his personal standing might add lustre to his Embassy. But M. Reynaud was not concerned with keeping M. Daladier's promises.

And who should go to Madrid, if Marshal Pétain consented in the course of Ministerial changes planned for an early date to join the Government as *cover*? Should it be M. Georges Bonnet, who was busily putting obstacles in the path of the Cabinet, or M. Piétri who was a candidate for any position? And what about Rome where M. de Monzie might perhaps do well and whither M. Bonnet and M. Piétri, twice nominated, and even M. Mistler would all fly with enthusiasm?

I pass over these selections the more safely for the reason that, if M. Paul Reynaud considered the problem mainly from the point of view of creating a favourable impression, his intimates were occupied with a far more definite plan: they aimed at nothing less than getting rid of M. Léger.

They stressed to M. Paul Reynaud the timeliness of this removal. M. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General of the Foreign Office since 1933, had many enemies of all kinds. There were the enemies of Aristide Briand, who in harrying his former principal private secretary assuaged, beyond the grave, their old-established hatred: there were the patrons and friends of candidates for a succession which

was too slow for their liking in falling vacant. Now, these candidates were numerous. Among those mentioned was M. François Poncet, former deputy, ex-Ambassador to Berlin, whence he went to Rome where he fared no better : there was M. Noel, Ambassador to the Polish Government, a relative of M. Flandin whose personal private secretary he was in the Ministry of 1934-35 : he had also been secretary to the Cabinet of M. Pierre Laval : then, too, there was M. Charles Roux, Ambassador to the Vatican who, since his father was not forgotten, had backing in Parliament and might turn his Marseilles origin to account with M. Paul Reynaud's circle, if M. Baudouin himself were not among the candidates and if he had no reason to dread the barrage put up by the influential M. Joseph Caillaux, President of the Finance Commission of the Senate.

Had M. Joseph Caillaux forgotten—it would be surprising if he had—that a young secretary of the French Embassy in Rome, called Charles Roux, sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1915 a formal denunciation of the "defeatist intrigues" of a deputy and former French Minister who was no other than M. Caillaux himself. The reports had been the starting point of the accusation which was to bring M. Caillaux before the High Court. In addition M. Alexis Léger had against him the turbulent M. Anatole de Monzie, the most tenacious of the men who had helped towards his appointment in 1933.

M. Anatole de Monzie had vigorously importuned M. Daladier and M. Paul Boncour, at that time Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs, to pension off M. Philippe Berthelot, who was laid low by the illness which was to carry him off shortly after, for against M. Berthelot, who was guilty in his eyes of having "manufactured Czecho-Slavakia" and of being in the tow of M. Benès, he nourished one of those active animosities peculiar to him : indirectly, by ricochet, as it were, M. Léger had reaped the benefit of it, but since M. de Monzie failed to find in the new Secretary-

General the docility for which he hoped, he speedily accused him of having purely and simply put on the dead man's political shoes. Consequently he neglected no pretext, even in public, for directing against him the murderous fire of his Lewis gun, that is, of his ardent and varied verve.

In seven years of office M. Léger must certainly have had more often to refuse favours than to grant them, though he was habitually courteous in doing so. He was, moreover, a convenient target for members of Parliament who, not venturing to attack the Minister directly, did so by using the permanent Secretary-General as a detour. Lastly there were leagued against M. Léger all the ex-Ministers, deputies, senators, journalists, financiers and industrialists who, though scattered and sometimes not even acquainted with each other, formed what M. Georges Bonnet had described to Mr. Sumner Welles as the peace party. They did not forgive him for mounting guard over the Franco-British Alliance. They represented him as deliberately hostile to Italy because he applied the brakes to a pro-Italian tendency, which was prepared to concede everything, with the same firm patience with which he had kept in check an Italophobia which was disposed to poison relations altogether. In him they saw the man most capable, by his incessant vigilance, of getting in the way of any fraudulent scheme of the kind that Herr von Ribbentrop was constantly setting on foot by the indirect route of Holland, Italy or Spain. In order to discredit him there was nothing that they would not dare. If a difficulty arose they put it down to him, even if he had foreseen it and forewarned the governments so that they might avoid it. But if a favourable event took place, then he had none of the credit for it, despite his having, as in the case of the Franco-Turkish Treaty, prepared it with infinite precautions. He could not even, according to the circumstances of the situation, either defend himself or express pride in his achievement, for by the very nature

of his office silence and a kind of impassivity were imposed upon him.

As for those who ought to have put a stop to this injustice, that was asking too much of them ! The successes they took to themselves : as for the errors or misfortunes, well, it was their good fortune that there was someone there to bear the burden of them on his shoulders. However, I exclude M. Daladier from this, hoping that it will not do him harm. More than once I heard him say in the presence of witnesses : " They're attacking Léger. But if we hadn't got him . . . ! They don't know all he does, all he attempts, all he prevents and even, despite the obstacles, all he manages to do."

Finally, as we must note, for in all this M. Léger must have had some little share of responsibility, he sometimes baffled some of his partisans and friends and, still more, some who were indifferent to his fate by a refined style of language, rich in substance, but in which they feared an enigma was hidden. He was too magnanimous towards them, he wished to leave them something to understand. That is what an ex-Minister was complaining of when he said to me one day : " Yes ! But he is esoteric ! "

Léger had the delicacy not to appear to impose his opinion on a problem. With certain people one need never fear being categorical.

It was perhaps this elegance of expression which did M. Léger harm in M. Reynaud's mind. The latter was more of a maker of formulas and an adapter of other people's arguments and ideas than a real thinker. The maieutics of M. Léger were calculated to disconcert him. He said so one day to some one who asked him : " Don't you hit it off with Léger ? "

" Oh, yes. But we haven't the same type of mind. I've no use for his maieutics."

In reality it was only a very trivial rift which would have filled up altogether if M. Reynaud had not had beside him people ruthlessly bent on ruining M. Léger, and who

did not deny themselves the pleasure of pointing out to M. Reynaud that, by getting rid of him, he would accomplish a master-stroke. At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber at the end of April, M. Paul Reynaud, stopping the attacks on the Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay which were beginning, had said with the outward swagger that he liked to display: "I beg you not to lay the blame on men and administrations. There is a Minister. He is present. I am he."

But this jauntiness might, perhaps, weaken on the morning or evening, when they would say to him: "Sign! You will please Bonnet, Flandin, Mistler, de Monzie, Maurras, Bunau-Varilla, Lemery . . ." and also "Violet-Beard" of the "hinge group," who on the very day of the Ministry's presentation before Parliament had uttered an indictment of the Quai d'Orsay and of M. Léger.

He was not weakening yet. And Léger had, all the same, reliable friends and men who paid homage to his worth and his services. I do not speak of myself, who was probably also included in the hostility that M. Léger encountered in M. Reynaud's circle, but I refer to Léon Blum, Herriot and Daladier, who were all to be reckoned with, as was Delbos, who was disconcerted by Léger's manner, but who recognised the truth and loyalty of his policy. I refer also to British statesmen.

But the pressure was severe. Reynaud's associates said to him: "It will be the starting point of a great spectacular diplomatic movement which will make a deep impression on public opinion." It was not a question, they conceded, of shelving M. Léger altogether. "Give him the post in London," they said. "There he will be welcome. Churchill, Eden, Chamberlain and Halifax will not then be able to betray the slightest sign of ill-humour. Corbin can be sent to Rome, room being made by moving M. François Poncet to some board of directors, or an economic under-secretariat. There's M. Peyrouton at Bucharest."

"But Malvy wants Madrid for his son-in-law."

" You can tell him that it's a matter of a great task, for which Peyrouton, the embodiment of energy, is indispensable."

" Then there's Thierry ! You know very well we can't touch him."

" I'll look after that, leave it to me," said M. Baudouin peremptorily.

" But who is to replace Léger ? "

" Baudouin," cut in an imperious voice.

" Would you accept ? "

" There's no question about it," replied the same voice.

" Any way, we should have a man of our own there ! "

" Look out ! " said someone gently. " You can't touch Corbin. In the first place Léger would not consent to replace him. ' Either I have fulfilled my task badly,' he will say to you, ' in which case put me on the unattached list ; or I have fulfilled it well, and must remain where I am. In no circumstances would I consent to the removal of M. Corbin from London, where he is *persona gratissima* and the right man, with a prestige won for him by his qualities, and which he would not find waiting for him in Rome, where he would have everything to conquer.' "

That day, while promising themselves that they would return to the charge, they went no further. They had put out feelers in the direction of some American papers. The telegraphic censorship stopped them. So they decided to await forthcoming better days before putting into triumphant execution a plan whose purpose was becoming clearly defined.

This plan was naturally M. Baudouin's, and it was, moreover, approved, supported and desired by someone to whom I have as yet made but discreet allusion.

The rôle played by this person was already preponderant. Paired and interlaced with that of M. Baudouin, it would become decisive, capital.

Let us venture to scrutinize the faces of these two.

## Chapter XVII

### Paul Reynaud's Evil Geniuses—A Woman

HÉLÈNE DE PORTES, *née* REBUFFET—THE ENCHANTRESS  
TAMED

M. PAUL REYNAUD has had two evil geniuses—a woman and a man. It will never be known whether M. Reynaud, who undeniably dreamed of being the man who would win the war, would not actually have won it if he had not had Hélène de Portes and Paul Baudouin combined to precipitate him into defeat. I repeat: combined, for one of the two alone would probably not have sufficed.

There exists a category of beings—that half of humanity which the usages of honour shield even from flowers. But if there be among them a woman who, by her presence, by her words, alternately caressing and harsh, by her tenacious pressure, by the dominance of her will and by a singular charm has exercised a pernicious influence on events through the man she subjugated and the men she subdued, should the historian or the memorialist keep silence and pass on? Does not truth have overriding rights? Is not justice itself sovereign? A man is accused of desertion. Cannot—must not—the tribunal of opinion look to see if there are not attenuating circumstances, if some siren has not led him away and urged him into his crime, and if she is not at least as guilty as he? Is it not our duty to summon the enchantress to the box as witness, or perhaps to the dock as chief among the accused, and to say: “Bring in Hélène de Portes, *née* Rebuffet!”

But the court usher will call in vain for Hélène de Portes, *née* Rebuffet. At a bend in a road the Great Judge seized

her and carried her off to the place whence no one has ever returned. Then does death quash all judicial action? No! Not all. History guards her own with prerogatives that nothing can shackle. It has even the right to raise the coffin lid to take a last look at the face of the siren.

She was not beautiful! No! She was not. There is no need to be in order to be a disastrous influence. She was elegant, but not more so than many others, less, indeed, than a few favoured of the gods. Her way of walking, quick of step, disclosed that the suppleness of her limbs and the agility of her whole body were maintained by physical exercise. Her face was somewhat angular, her complexion, not free from blemishes, had a trace of chestnut about it; features and eyelids bore the traces of the fatigues of an eventful life. Her voice, at times a little sharp, aimed to master rather than to please. It would happen sometimes that she looked even unlovely, just as though she were striving to be so, for there was contrariness in her wilful nature. Anyone who knew her even slightly could guess that she was ardent and ruthless in every way. Above all, she was audacious, and had so great a contempt for obstacles that she was redoubtable, and duly feared by her rivals, whether of the *salon*, the political ante-room, or the boudoir. Something of all this is comprised in that vague and yet characteristic expression: "She had an air about her." Was she, at the same time, artful? Certainly she was; sufficiently so, indeed, to be a match for others at the game of secret slander, abusive interpretations, calculated calumnies and venomous comments. But she preferred direct attack, haughty, and even violent, for thereby her will to dominate could be more surely exercised.

This craving—certainly innate and then passionately cultivated—for leading, holding the reins and making the whip crack, would have made another such woman a circus rider or a lion tamer. Since her destiny, which she had patiently assisted, had led her from the *bourgeoisie*



of Marseilles to the *salons* of Paris and the studies of the Ministries, it was in the political arena that she would carry off the triumphal palm. She had chosen a thoroughbred, lively, highly-strung, difficult and stubborn, but of great ability, which she kept well in hand and which obviously delighted in submitting to her control. A penetrating observer remarked to me one day, after having had a good look at M. Paul Reynaud and Mme. de Portes: "It's far more like Diana clinging to her charger than Venus clutching her prey."

The association of the two had long been tolerantly recognised. If M. Paul Reynaud lacked very solid support in Parliament, where his independence of mind had made him a non-party man, in the world of affairs, of the law courts, of the Press and in society, he had an imposing array of people who showed him sympathy, friendship and even devotion.

Mme. Hélène de Portes reduced the number somewhat, but she chose from among them a circle devoted at least as much to herself as to him, if not more. She had sufficient breadth of mind not to turn away, but rather, on the contrary, to seek out as collaborators people who were the most gifted, the most energetic, and the most capable of furthering Paul Reynaud's career, but she had not enough of that quality to suffer one of them to show any trace of independence towards her.

If they did not actually owe their posts to her, their allegiance had to be even more complete. It was for having snapped his fingers at this law that one of Paul Reynaud's oldest collaborators had ultimately to surrender his position. It is true that he had brought down much enmity upon himself, notably on the part of M. Daladier, against whom he was fostering a hostile campaign. But he had political sense, and might possibly have saved Paul Reynaud, who never had any, from serious mistakes, particularly at the time when he was forming his Cabinet. Mme. de Portes had a hand in his departure and opposed

his return. Did she think that, if Paul Reynaud lacked political sense, she had enough for two? One is tempted to fancy so from the exclusivism which she made so evident at the expense of all those not stamped with the mark of her approval.

Until shortly before M. Paul Reynaud became Prime Minister she was relatively discreet about manifesting her feelings. With my own ears I have heard her deploring—was it only because I was listening?—the coldness of the relations between M. Reynaud and M. Daladier, and their incessant quarrels, and wishing that the two could find a common ground of understanding, if not of friendship. I say until shortly before he became Prime Minister, for from about January, 1940, on she began, more or less in every quarter, to assert the candidature of the Minister of Finance for the Premiership, and did so in the clumsiest manner, that is to say by spreading abroad criticisms against the Head of the Government which, repeated to M. Daladier, revised and intensified, increased the mutual animosity of the two men. To her, also, were ascribed remarks of unmistakably defeatist tendency, as well as conspiratorial meetings with the “strong party” of M. Georges Bonnet, and it was asserted that her tendency left a mark on Paul Reynaud. Was this a tactical move to range solidly behind Paul Reynaud the largest possible number of people who had an interest in the fall of M. Daladier, or was it conviction?

Both. The tactics were not adroit. As to the conviction, common sense is powerless to explain it. With herself as a defeatist and Paul Reynaud a “fight to the last ditch” man, it seemed a poor way of serving him, and therefore of serving herself, since her hegemony could not be separated from M. Paul Reynaud's. She had a burning thirst for power. She wanted to scale the topmost summits and from those heights direct, command, subjugate, compel, break . . . she wanted to be the supreme power. How could she imagine that she could realise her dream except by complete victory? To her, no doubt,

more often than to anyone else, he must have said : " I will win the war ! " Now, with him victorious, she, too, would be Victory ! Everyone would be at her feet and kissing her hands ; rivals, none of whom was a match for her : the others, too, from those who had humiliated her by their patronage in her early days in the great city that she had yet to conquer, to those who had dared to condemn her for having wished to live too full a life, every life, all lives : and the men likewise, those whom she could not forgive for having scorned her, or removed themselves from her orbit : those, again, to whom she had granted the privilege of being her docile attendants or her jesters : and Paul's rivals like that Flandin, and his adversaries, and Daladier and his friends, such as that Mandel, who really had the impertinence to see through her far too clearly, and the whole pack of them. And then, who knows ? The Elysée ? Perhaps something more than that. Why not ? When one dreams, is it possible to dream too much ?

But, no ! That was not the way of it ! She said to herself, and others said to her : " Paul's crazy with his ' I shall win the war ! ' We can't win the war. We can only win the defeat. Yes, win the defeat. "

Who cast a spell on the sorceress ? Who tamed the tamer ? Who ? Who ?

Day after day, in ever more trustful intimacy Hélène de Portes and Paul Baudouin gained a more and more effective influence one over the other. M. Baudouin took possession of Hélène de Portes' brain ; he became the dictator of her conscience. She would no longer think except through him ! She would cease to think Paul Reynaud, or France, or war, she would think Baudouin. She would end by being so obsessed by Baudouin's thoughts, that with her dominating temperament she would appear at times to be driving him along the path which he had taken. And it would be true. When he did not dare throw down the mask, she would make him ashamed for

not throwing it down. In return, he would be her factotum, the executor of her unworthy works. He would espouse her hatreds and plot her vengeance.

Together—he the friend and collaborator, she the companion and Egeria—they would form the plot of each day, each hour, each second, against Paul Reynaud.

## Chapter XVIII

### Paul Reynaud's Evil Geniuses—Paul Baudouin

HIS ORIGIN : INSPECTION OF FINANCE—HIS MANIFESTO IN THE "REVUE DE PARIS" : THE "DATA OF THE FRENCH PROBLEM"—SYMPATHY FOR GERMANY—THREE CONFIDENTIAL BROCHURES—THE MIRAGE OF PEACE—FASCIST TENDENCIES—THE CATHOLIC MEDITERRANEAN DREAM—FEAR OF THE TIDE OF REVOLUTION—"PEACE PROBLEM"—M. BAUDOUIN'S ASCENDANCY OVER M. PAUL REYNAUD

WE have already seen the silhouette of M. Baudouin outlined against the back of the picture when M. Paul Reynaud formed his Government at the end of March and appointed him Secretary of the War Cabinet and Under-Secretary of State at his side.

Whence did he come? His name was almost unknown to the public at large.

He belonged to that body of Inspectors of Finance from which have come so many outstanding officials and notable men of affairs, but also so many untrustworthy and unbearable minds. Ordinarily there is no middle road for the products of this great school: either the exceptional intellectual overwork to which candidates for Inspectorships of Finance are subjected prior to the examination for entry has atrophied their brains for life, or they resist it. Nothing or hardly anything more is heard of the former, but the others rise quickly to prominent positions in financial administrations. From there, either because tempting offers are made them, or because they

take the trouble to prepare for their departure themselves, they leap towards the most remunerative positions in big banks, financial companies and great industries. There they find old hands who, when their own interests are not wholly opposed to it, welcome them and help them on their way, for a close and peculiar solidarity binds this strange congregation together. Among themselves they are critical, and it may happen that they tear each other to pieces in violent tussles for pre-eminence, but against the rest of the world they form a single block and claim to be something superior, something superhuman—the salt of the earth!

M. Baudouin stood out among his peers as one of the boldest and most intelligent. From his birth he had been well served by powerful backing, but also by his personal gifts, which he had contrived to show to advantage in board-rooms and then in the offices of the Ministry of Finance. He followed the usual channels of his profession. He, too, abandoned the Rue de Rivoli for an authoritative position in one of the biggest concerns: the Bank of Indo-China. He had financial power. It was not enough for him. He felt that he had the stuff of rulers in him. To see him moving about in the world of affairs, in political circles, the doors of which were open to him, and in the *salons* to which he brought only his mask, who could guess that this banker was devoured by the ambition to govern? It was not, one must admit, of vulgar origin: it was not of that common kind which can be satisfied with an arm-chair in a ministerial palace and the title of Minister of whatever it might be on a visiting card. He knew them, these politicians, and it was not in order to be like them that the rôle of leader attracted him. I do not know if he thought of begging the masses to give him a legislative mandate. I doubt it, for his pride despised the *vulgum pecus* and would be ill-content to owe to it the rise to power which haunted him.

His dream, which was fed from a religious source, was

just as much to be an apostle and exercise his sway over the souls, thoughts and wills of men as to lead them. He compared himself to a poet, then to a saint, and then to one Elect. With this mentality he was ready to undertake anything which would fulfil the prayer of his faith and of his ambition. Both, moreover, were so closely dovetailed that, when faced with some step that he had taken, it was often impossible for me to know which of the two had inspired it.

His personality became mingled with public life when, in 1936, M. Léon Blum and M. Auriol included him in a committee of financial experts. M. Blum did not preserve a favourable recollection of him, but it is possible that that was not M. Baudouin's fault.

Until the advent of M. Reynaud his ambition had been ambling gently along in the shadows. He must have found that the time was long, for his temperament is not that of a patient man, even though he has a great power of dissimulation, of which he would later give matchless instances. But he did not waste this time. He had friends who sang his praises, describing him as an intellectual with original ideas. He aroused admiring sympathy in a number of people by representing himself as tormented by crises of conscience. In quasi-secret meetings he became the leader of a kind of neo-catholicism which aimed at the moral regeneration of France. Moreover, he inspired respect in many by his confident speech and forceful bearing. When he entered a room it was not with little steps. He would charge in head first, as though preparing to butt an invisible enemy in the stomach. Well set-up, strong, he would be almost handsome did not an indefinable something about his face betray the falsity of his mind and the hardness of his heart.

At the beginning of 1938 he tried to attract attention by a sort of manifesto: "*The Data of the French Problem*," which he published in the *Revue de Paris*. The roots of his present work are inscribed there, as is

an inclination to solve the "French Problem" by a partial abdication.

In it he held the old supremacy of France very cheap. From the manner in which he noted that the neighbouring countries to France, formerly divided and thinly peopled, *have combined into two powerful empires intoxicated by their teeming youth*, and that *the new Germany and the new Italy demand their place in the sun*, one could foresee that his professional distortion of outlook would urge him to seek a compromise.

"To turn one's back on these problems," he wrote, "to neglect and stifle them by enclosing them in juridical arguments is to court disaster."

He was so well aware that he would offend the conscience of the country that he pointedly recalled that he was an ex-service man. But it is quite possible to have been a soldier of noble courage and to be a disloyal mind. One can also have read a great deal and remember nothing: one can be familiar with history and yet have grasped none of its lessons.

I have only to delve into M. Baudouin's thoughts to find corroboration of the statements I have just put forward.

"No insurmountable obstacle," he wrote, "*separates France from Germany. It is a crime against our country to assert that war with Germany is inevitable.*"

"We must understand that the youth of that great nation is eager for wider horizons, and that its disciplined and massive strength is not infallibly destined to be opposed to the less vigorous but more supple strength of France. We must get rid of the obsession of fear which has led our country to subordinate its external policy to alliances which are often only the outcome of weakness and the products of a dangerous sentimentality. Only a powerful and morally strong France, conscious of its spiritual riches and of the leading rôle which it is incumbent on it to play in a West threatened on all sides, can enter into partnership for the work of defence and reconstruction with a Germany still animated as a whole by the



lofty feelings of esteem with which her former adversary inspired her.

"What Germany does not forgive is not that we won the war, but that, during the ten years of black distress which followed it, we did not know how, or even wish, to consider her problems, give her advice or grant her support. Europe might then have been reconstructed with ease. Although this task seems to-day almost desperate, we must free ourselves of this daily anguish by sacrificing many habits of mind to that work which commands the future."

That, having written such a page as this, which is really a defiance of all history and especially of the history of the last twenty years, the man who conceived and signed it should have become the collaborator of M. Reynaud in a War Cabinet set up to win the war, is enough to make one wonder whether M. Reynaud was not at the time the victim of one of those abstractions which it is the business of psychiatrists to analyse and cure.

After this significant profession of faith it is quite in order to find M. Baudouin adding that: "*The Franco-German problem must be solved peacefully, without impairing the close friendship which unites us to England.*"

This polite raising of the hat is patently an act of pure courtesy, not to say, of pure hypocrisy. The feelings of his inmost heart must be looked for in another and very clear sentence.

"*The possibility and necessity of an understanding with Germany must be affirmed, in spite of the inability of the masses to understand, despite the charm of long habit and the criticisms which, on this subject, readily become insulting.*"

Jacques Bainville had answered this in advance when he wrote: "*There is one sure means for France to become Germany's friend and not to expose herself to Germany's ill-temper, that is to fall in with her wishes, to abdicate will and initiative. German peace is submission to German policy.*"

Dear, great Bainville, I prefer to know that you are lying lifeless under a tombstone in the Marigny cemetery rather

## Reynaud's Evil Geniuses—Paul Baudouin 247

than to think of you forced to behold what I am beholding, and to suffer what we are suffering !

At least you are spared the bitter sorrow of seeing this man and that among your political friends, who were your proud companions in arms against the eternal enemy of France, condemning themselves to seek the approval of the man who had as his qualification for directing the external policy of France nothing but this pro-Greman phraseology !

Does this mean that in the twenty-five pages or so in which M. Baudouin studied the *data of the French problem* there was nothing worth bearing in mind ? If we said so from bias we should put ourselves in the wrong, seeing that we have deplored the decadence of public spirit, the degeneration of political morality and the corruption of Parliamentary democracy in France.

M. Baudouin's little manifesto was a mixture in which the good, the normal and the worst were mingled with a scarcely concealed sympathy for the totalitarian formulas. But I think it was the worst which predominated.

The notions of Christianity and Latinism were expressed in the following profession of faith with which he closed :  
“ *We are among those who hold that Western civilisation must remain faithful to Christ or cease to exist. More than any other country France is impregnated with the Christian ideal of justice and charity. It is consoling to be able to declare that after so many attempts to kill her soul, our country is still herself, amid the threatened West, solid in latinity, which, despite appearances, remains inscribed in deeds as well as in the minds of Frenchmen.* ”

The article in the *Revue de Paris* was dated February, 1938. We have other more recent works from his pen. Three confidential and extremely rare brochures in which the former director of the Bank of Indo-China, in between two journeys to Rome, spilled the overflow of his dreams of reform. There we must seek his real ideas. I say *seek*, for in the two last ones, written during the war, he thought

himself compelled to tone down some of his premeditations a little.

It is in the first, pretentiously entitled : " Messages and Ethics " that the author compares himself with the poets and saints. What ! Compares himself ? Rather consecrates himself a poet and saint. The brochure contains an incredible medley of rubbish, in which an immeasurable vanity covers a naïve mysticism added to a series of child-like sayings and truisms.

When he informs us that : " The mystery of life is in us," that " Man is necessary to the world," and that : " The specific energy of man is psychic energy," then we are duly made aware, we must thank him for his disclosures. Moreover, we are forced to take his word for it when he ranges himself among the " Saints and the true artists," that is to say, the poets, who " not only raise their psychic energy even to the extent of dominating matter, but also, by their examples in which true reality is revealed, help in the regeneration of men greedy for spiritual nourishment."

If he accuses man, " rendered insensitive by his pride, stifled by his false knowledge, worn out by his noisy and indolently sensual life," of no longer knowing how to " contemplate the world with eyes that are young, innocent, wondering and brotherly towards beings and things," it is obvious that he does not include himself among the guilty. And, as a matter of fact, he speedily tells us so : " Shepherds constitute human aristocracy." And he is one of them. " To re-establish the human touch, to restore the moral values on which all civilisation rests, that is the task of to-day. Let us be fervent workers at it."

I will refrain from making game of his mystical flights. Paradise may or may not be " joyful ascent towards God, union through love." That is something purely personal and, consequently, there is no discussing it.

The second message dated Christmas, 1939, refers to *our present condition*.

## Reynaud's Evil Geniuses—Paul Baudouin 249

In it he accentuates that indulgence towards Germany manifested in his article in the *Revue de Paris*, and which would appear again in yet a third message concerned more especially with the problems of peace. He only alludes to the "atrocious responsibilities of the Nazi leaders" in order to put it on record that misunderstanding and shirking on the part of France and England encouraged Germany's "monstrous dream of power."

I would gladly fall in with the assertion if it meant that France and England had been so grievously mistaken as to permit Germany, whose unity they had failed to break, a military resurrection which they could easily have stifled. That error I have amply demonstrated. But M. Baudouin is a long way from my notion which is far too simple for his giant brain. He has nothing but disdain for those who "dare to invoke the Treaty of Westphalia which has the defect of being three hundred years old, and dead for more than a century." This is his idea:

*"The duty of our country was to organise a Germany bearable for us and for her and to keep her in that state both for her good and ours. We weakened in this task, the hardest and most necessary of all those which devolved upon us, and the best among the Germans would be justified in reproaching us for it."*

I might ask this financier if he had not heard tell of certain "frozen credits" which England, France and America benevolently threw into the crucible of German revenge. He forgets that. He looks at the future and wishes to see everything new and spacious so as to rebuild "without rejecting any audacious flight of the spirit."

Very well. But I am afraid that what he wrote with a generous underlying motive in favour of unhappy Germany may cause him to be harshly reproached by victorious Nazidom. Whatever Hitler and Herr von Ribbentrop may think about it, and despite the gracious condescension that M. Baudouin had in view, the lines we are now about to savour are a formal condemnation of his Ministerial actions and of the capitulation in which they ended:

"In order that Europe may become free and stable once more, it is necessary that the power of Germany be reduced. But this reduction may assume two aspects. It can be absolute, and therefore difficult to effect and still more difficult to maintain, as experience of the past twenty years well shows. It can be relative and lasting thanks to agreement between those nations which do not aim at dominating the Continent.

"Owing to her central position, her vast riches in men and natural products, her industrial organisation and her network of river communications which urge her to overflow her frontiers, Germany has immense advantages at her disposal. *So she would again become the most powerful country in Europe if no modification of her present structure was introduced, if she was left entirely free to develop her strength in an atmosphere of complete equality. Parity in the limitation of armaments or even in general disarmament would not destroy the Reich's superiority in power over each of her peaceful, trustful neighbours, in which men do not become automata as soon as they are penned in barracks or factories.*"

These lines will certainly be reckoned a crime of *lèse-Allemagne* by the Wilhelmstrasse. For my part I seize on them—and the text authorises me to do so—in order to accuse him of having, by the request for an armistice, himself compromised the minimum that he desired.

No doubt he hid in them an oratorical precaution intended to pave the way for a negative answer to the following question: "*Will the war be continued until the enemy is crushed?*" He wanted indeed to foresee: "*internal disturbances in Germany bringing to power men less corrupt than the present rulers,*" he awaited modification in the "*conditions of a struggle which had begun with dramatic events and which might well conclude in the same manner.*"

He admitted that "*Germany freed from the Nazis would still be troubled by a dream of universal domination.*" But—and it is here one can see what he was really driving at—

## Reynaud's Evil Geniuses—Paul Baudouin 251

*"to reject a priori all idea of negotiations before the total collapse of the might of Germany is impossible."*

Doubtless one cannot reject anything *a priori* when one is faced with a future which no human being can ever be certain of controlling. One can only be strong in intention and will if one is capable of willing. But too often, and I would wager that it was the case here, if a man says he would not reject "*a priori* all idea of negotiations," it is because he is determined not to reject the idea, and possibly determined to encourage it. In this there is a fine distinction of thought which the casuist who was to be found, as so often happens, in this mystic had certainly weighed.

He had so thoroughly realised—it was wartime—that ill-disposed persons might, as I have done, discover his real drift, that, having already used a precaution *beforehand*, he had recourse to another *afterwards* :

*"What is necessary is to be firm enough, strong enough, far enough removed from doubt and uneasiness not to rush headlong towards the mirage of peace as though towards salvation."*

I ask—and M. Baudouin will be asked one day when he has to answer, though it will not be at Riom—whether he and his colleagues of Bordeaux did not throw a France which he no longer wished nor knew how to defend at the feet of her implacable enemy : was he strong enough, firm enough, far enough removed from doubt and weariness ? Did he not rush headlong towards the *mirage of peace* ?

Assuredly M. Baudouin did not then plan to trample underfoot the close union with England which, at the very moment when he was writing his message, his friend, chief of the morrow and future victim, M. Paul Reynaud was beginning to seal with the financial and monetary agreement of December, 1939.

On the contrary, he drew attention to it, but follow the meanderings of his discourse carefully, they are worth attention :

*"The war will only really be won if the strength of Germany remains in future inferior to that of the victors. The value of the Peace Treaty will depend on how far many and close economic bonds definitely seal the accord of the powers who have defended order and liberty. The industrial and agricultural resources of Germany and her capacity for work would be inferior to the wealth and energy of an England and France organised in a solid union. Short of this union which would assure the relative weakness of Germany the problem of peace admits of no solution in the present divided state of Europe."*

*The solid union of an organised England and France* he therefore admits in "the present divided state of Europe." He would advocate it, too, in his third message as forming the twin base of a large group of nations. But his heart did not go out towards it. It did not go out to democratic, Liberal, Anglo-Saxon Great Britain. Listen and remember :

*"In the organisation of peace we must not neglect the important rôle which falls to the lot of Italy, a great Continental power, as guardian of a part of Central Europe and the Balkans."*

Then hear him exclaim :

*"Can one deny the existence of a family of Roman and Christian nations? What is born in the mind and heart is sooner or later assured of real life. We are moving towards this maturity of our Continent and we must work for it almost despite ourselves."*

*"So, no little States reduced to a miserable existence. But alongside Germany, a Federation of Catholic States which will find their unity in their political, spiritual and economic balance. Between the new Germany, this Danubian Federation, Italy, Spain, France and Britain, the Peace will define and establish broad currents for exchange of goods and service."*

*"Africa, the common domain and principal reserve of Europe, will be affected in its internal organisation by this*

*more spacious conception of economic balance. There will be no far too narrow divisions into Customs areas, but the system of the open door. Each country will bring to this construction its share of sacrifice, whether of material interests or national pride. If we want to save the Christian spirit of charity and fraternity, which alone cements Europe, which is its sole justification for existence, then this spirit must hold sway not only over private life but over the international order. Egoism is as contemptible in nations as in individuals. Shall Europe perish for lack of breadth of mind and generous impulses ? ”*

May M. Baudouin's God prevent me from waxing ironical over a conception which has nothing ridiculous, still less culpable about it, and which one can even defend with very good reasons, but if M. Baudouin really had the vision of a Federation of Catholic States—as I believe—and of a Mediterranean and Western Union hinging on Franco-British solidarity—which seems to me doubtful, for deep down he is anti-British—where is his dream now, where is it ? Where is it ?

And how great was his aberration ! He depended on Italy because she was the backbone of his plan. He reckoned on her intervention in favour of a mild armistice and an almost painless peace. Victorious, France might have been able—I don't know—to make M. Baudouin's dream true. But beaten, stretched prone beneath the German jackboot, and deprived of her partner, England, whom he abandoned, what a defiance of the plainest common sense ! After that what do his solutions for economic and financial problems matter to us ? They consist in the setting up “ of economic fascies composed of the countries who wish to identify themselves with them.” This is no new idea, and I only stop to underline the form of expression in which the influence of the language of Mussolini is evident.

In his third message M. Baudouin is very airy in his attitude towards the small countries of Central Europe.



He abandons them, whether they like it or not, to Germany, in virtue of her geographical position. They have not "evolved" as far, and there is nothing for them but to "part with a portion of their economic freedom."

M. Baudouin had to hold himself in check as long as he was talking of international policy. He showed less restraint in dealing with internal matters. One fear obsesses him which I beg the reader to bear in mind, for we shall come across it again at a crucial hour: "*the fear of the revolutionary tide.*" He even gave vent to a cry which spoke volumes, coming from a man who had at first exhibited his horror—his legitimate horror—of war in itself.

"*Let us not regret them (the great events in progress) if they spare us the worst of evils: civil war.*"

Was it the excesses of the Communist party in France which exerted such an influence on his mind from this point of view? It is possible, and when he exclaimed, not without nobility: "*That the Frenchman will have none of a monstrous universe in which the human being loses significance, none of a mechanical world in which the ennobling of inert matter and the lustre of metals would be paid for by the slavery of the body and the extinction of the soul,*" then I cannot but approve him, being as proudly as he, and probably even more so, an individualist and an anti-associationist.

On the other hand when, from that starting point, he goes on to affirm that: "*to struggle openly against Russia is probably the best road to material success, it is undoubtedly the surest road to victory in the domain of the spirit, and this victory determines all the others,*" it is, for a future Minister for Foreign Affairs, a dangerous mixing and complicating of the problems. Bolshevism is one thing and the Russian State is another. Herr von Ribbentrop is in a position to tell him so. It was in this connection that M. Baudouin, seeing himself, perhaps, setting off clad in armour on a crusade and comparing himself to a knight, wrote: "Who

loses, wins." That is his motto. I do not like it. But, having read it, I understand Bordeaux.

By losing everything, he thought he had won. Will he say what he won? Yes, he will. He virtually said it when he dared to have the date, May 10th—*horresco referens*—May 10th, put at the head of the *new order* in process of development in a France doubly in thrall to the German and the Vichy Governments.

In the message just analysed and freely quoted, M. Baudouin was not afraid to assert the resolve to build up a strong power which he coveted for the slaking of his own ambition. He sketched it in outline in this sufficiently unequivocal sentence :

*"The Parliamentary Organism, modified and consequently efficacious, reduced to its function of control, would allow the continuity of action of a powerful executive drawn from a legal representation of the real élite of the country—that of work and heart—and deriving its support from it."*

In a fresh message called "*Discernment*," and bearing the sub-title, "*Peace Problems*," he developed his idea more fully.

The direction of the new order would be entrusted to a "*courageous and farsighted élite*," to "*well-informed and sensitive leaders*."

He presented himself as a Christian prophet to whom Jesus, whose Name he invokes, had revealed Himself, as a Savonarola thundering against the "*fireless hearth*" of a "*society without religion*," and insisting on what he termed the restoration of moral values, even at the price of a heavy expiation; he presented himself, too, as a Mussolini *ad usum Gallie*, whose vituperations against "*the disturbing influence of the French Revolution*" he adopted, together with a marked hint of anti-Semitism, and whose ascendancy he had dreams of imitating, for he ranged himself among those souls to whom, according to him, "*the land of France delegates the spiritual ideal along with the power and right of command.*"

Taking as basis what he called a "Christian humanism," he hurls anathemas at the parties: "No Left or Right! But honest people!" As if there were not honest people among all the parties! He decreed that: "*A united executive, strong enough to protect itself from demagoguery by subduing it, must take firmly in hand the task of putting the nation once more in order.*" Many years of constant work would be necessary to save our country, condemned to a rapid decadence—which would only be the ripening of the seed that has been sown—if envy, roguery, lying and laziness continued too often to be honoured by political successes and temporal rewards."

He put his confidence not in the "*arithmetic of electoral bodies,*" but in the virtue of a *small number of individuals*, and he made offer of himself.

"*France calls out now for boldness and reason, purity and nobility.*"

Having so high an opinion of himself, his moral qualities and his mission, one is led to believe that nothing would stop him. Indeed, nothing did stop him from the day when he was able to put his foot on one of the rungs of the ladder of power which M. Reynaud enabled him to mount. M. Reynaud did not share all the tendencies of M. Baudouin, but every day he would fall a little further under the influence of a will more inexorably bent than his own on the attainment of a single object, and whose hold would grow tighter and tighter as it exerted pressure each day, each hour, on a man overwhelmed with anxieties ever more absorbing and cruel. M. Reynaud would have vigour of words, M. Baudouin of will. At the psychological moment M. Baudouin would find means to wrest from the exhausted Reynaud a decision which he had previously opposed and thrust aside. M. Reynaud would not cease to say, "To the end!" and M. Baudouin to reply, "The end has come."

In the last days at Paris, during the days and nights at Bordeaux, it was M. Baudouin who, in concert with

Hélène de Portes, would wear away the nervous strength of M. Paul Reynaud until the latter, discouraged, unable to see things clearly any more, utterly lost, threw down his knapsack and fell in a heap at the side of the road, renouncing the whole of his responsibilities !

M. Reynaud was to go on his way to a wretched destiny, having been unequal to the one that France had assigned him. The Fates would sever the thread which fastened Hélène de Portes to life, and M. Baudouin would fulfil his part. "He would file France's petition in bankruptcy," and remain to assume the rôle of liquidator. That is what he would call *introducing a new order* !

But before we come to that we must make the bitter ascent of our Calvary.

## Chapter XIX

### M. Reynaud Against Gamelin

CAMPAIGN AGAINST M. PAUL REYNAUD—SPANISH ILL-WILL—DIPLOMATIC ADVANCE TO BRUSSELS—LETTER TO SIGNOR MUSSOLINI—INDICTMENT AGAINST GENERAL GAMELIN—CONFLICT WITH M. DALADIER—CRISIS PROBABLE, SHORT OF A MIRACLE

THE first ten days of May had not come to an end before it was quite apparent to all the old hands in French politics that the Reynaud Cabinet would not escape the tidal wave which was bearing down on it to sweep it away.

The Premier was so haunted by the thought, and those about him so much afraid of the advancing threat, that to a great extent he lost his head. He ceased to see things save in the light of the service they might do for him. If they were hostile to him he flew into a rage against them, which is a poor way of rendering them favourable. Since he had come to power, and especially since the disappointments of the Norwegian expedition, his actions were consistently inopportune. Stories went round of his blunders, his nerve-storms, his fits of anger, and his ill-considered inspirations—not to mention his sins of omission.

In Spanish circles, where already—without his having deserved it—there was more ill-will than sympathy, complaint was made that, now that he was in charge of French foreign affairs, he did nothing personally to induce forgetfulness of his earlier attitude towards Franco's Spain, notably in the matter of the gold of the Bank of Spain when Burgos and Barcelona laid simultaneous claim to it.

M. Malvy, M. Piétri and M. Bonnet, who made themselves out to be well informed, went to the length of asserting that M. Reynaud was ignorant of the presence of the Spanish Ambassador in Paris, despite the fact that this Ambassador (Señor Lequeriqua), who had immediately won himself a prominent place in the Diplomatic Corps, appeared to be animated by the friendliest desire to settle the difficulties still outstanding between Paris and Madrid.

As regards Belgium, the Allies were not in a very happy position. Repeatedly since the beginning of the war they had sounded the Chancellery of Brussels with the object of inducing the Belgian Government to appeal for Franco-British intervention before the German invasion became an accomplished fact. Each time the request was refused on the ground that the slightest gesture might furnish a pretext for violation by Germany of Belgian neutrality, and that as long as this neutrality was not violated, it had the advantage for France of preventing the Maginot Line from being turned. The argument was contested, but, whether it was disputable or not, was there not a risk in making another diplomatic advance, doomed to failure like the previous ones, of producing an unfortunate impression in Brussels, particularly at the Court, where, since the death of King Albert, and especially since March 7th, 1936, memories of the war of 1914-18 had grown gradually blurred?

And was there not the danger of swelling the current favourable to invasion in Berlin if this diplomatic offer should be known there?

M. Paul Reynaud did not think so; against the formal advice of his diplomatic counsellors he raised the matter with the Supreme War Council and got the better of British hesitation. Barely had the request been made during one night when the negative response was returned immediate and categorical. On the fundamental question experts may differ in their opinion, but this lack of care over the form of the action and the choice of the moment

is an indication of the state of physical and mental inferiority to which disappointments, illness and fear of political disgrace had brought M. Paul Reynaud.

Another still more significant incident. Signor Mussolini—which was no cause of surprise—sent a telegram of congratulations to Hitler on the occasion of the German dictator's fifty-first birthday. M. Reynaud could hit on nothing better than to seize this opportunity to write directly to Signor Mussolini, without acting through the Italian Ambassador in Paris, and reproach the Duce, not without patriotic vehemence, for the wishes he had expressed for the victory of Germany. No doubt he thought to insure himself against any reproach by indicating to Signor Mussolini that he was ready, as was borne out by his statement before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate, to go further along the road of concessions than anyone had advanced before! If M. Baudouin was his adviser in this, M. Reynaud had no reason to congratulate him.

Count Ciano was dumbfounded on receipt of this communication. Without delay he asked his representative in Paris whether "this was a matter of a personal letter or of a diplomatic document." Signor Guariglia replied that if it was a question of an official action he would have been informed of it by the authorities at the Quai d'Orsay, with whom he maintained cordial relations.

Thereupon, through the normal channels, Signor Mussolini sent M. Reynaud so curt a reply that Signor Guariglia was staggered, and told himself that all the efforts he had made over a period of months had been brought to nothing. The Duce, indeed, confined himself to pointing out to the Head of the French Government that he must singularly misunderstand the condition of the Rome-Berlin Axis to permit himself to comment on his telegram.

Signor Guariglia wanted to get to the bottom of the matter and tried to ascertain whether the Quai d'Orsay had really had no hand in it. When he put the question

even in a very mild form the stupor of the officials banished the last of his doubts. Unhappily, the Italian enigma became daily clearer in the pro-German sense, despite the urgent interventions of Washington and conciliatory action on the part of the Vatican. Meanwhile, relations between M. Daladier and M. Reynaud grew increasingly strained, to the knowledge of so many people that no one in the political world was unaware of it. It was not a favourable atmosphere for the operation M. Paul Reynaud was about to attempt, which was essentially of a kind to be decided upon and undertaken quite independently of any personal concern.

Nearly a month before, on April 12th, M. Reynaud, at a meeting of the War Council, had delivered an attack on General Gamelin which M. Daladier had bluntly stopped. Ever since, M. Reynaud had resolved to replace Gamelin as Commander-in-Chief, either by General Georges, General Huntziger, General Giraud, or General Weygand. Looking back on events we must regret the conditions in which the conflict took place.

Instead of having a preliminary conversation with the Minister of National Defence, and a cordial discussion about the reasons and advantages of a change as well as about the worth of the men between whom the choice would lie, M. Reynaud had raised the question without even warning his colleague of his intention. Perhaps he hoped to force his hand—which was pretty poor psychology—and had only succeeded by these hustling tactics in irritating M. Daladier, who had taken his stand and refused to budge. Gamelin had remained Generalissimo. We know what happened. If, on April 12th, another Generalissimo had been nominated, would he not have been able in the space of a month to make far-reaching changes in the spirit of the army? Would he——? But what is the good of hazarding theories about a future which was not to be?

What M. Paul Reynaud had been unable to obtain on



April 12th he decided to try to take by force on May 8th. For the next morning (May 9th) he called a Cabinet meeting to be held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and arrived with a bulky file, the contents of which it took him two hours to read. Many of his colleagues had not seen him for a fortnight. They found him much altered, thinner, feverish of eye, unsteady of voice. He had, however, been toned up to the greatest possible extent. His usual doctor, recalled from the army, had doped him to the full. Gradually Paul Reynaud grew animated, his reading became harsh, almost violent. The Council reacted in various ways to the indictment they heard. Some made an occasional note. The sadistically inclined glanced to and fro from M. Daladier, whose face was so expressionless as to look like a wall, to the Prime Minister, who turned the leaves heaped before him with the regularity of a metronome. Some put their heads between their hands to conceal their fright.

M. Paul Reynaud ceased to read. One of his friends, M. Lamoureux, to whom he had handed over the Ministry of Finance when he left the Rue de Rivoli for the Quai d'Orsay, and who had been warned of what was in store, asked for leave to speak.

"After the remarkable exposition we have just heard from the Prime Minister," he said, "I think we have only to fall in with what he proposes . . ."

But M. Daladier raised his finger.

"I call on the Minister of National Defence to speak."

The one-and-twenty people charged with the destinies of France turned inquiringly towards M. Daladier.

M. Daladier made reply in a tone of seeming calm. He declared that the problem raised by the Prime Minister was a grave one and could not be a matter of indifference to the Minister of National Defence. Was General Gamelin the ideal Commander-in-Chief? He would be wary of asserting that he was. Already he had made mental reservations about him. Perhaps in six months, three

months, or even to-morrow, he himself would have to lay such-and-such faults at General Gamelin's door. Perhaps there was a general more capable than he of preparing and achieving victory? If he were sure of that he would propose him at once for appointment at the head of the armies. But if such a man was not available, could one run the risk of making a change, perhaps on the eve of formidable events? The only question to debate was, therefore, to find out if the grievances put forward by the Prime Minister were conclusive. He took them one by one, exerting himself to show that, especially in the Norwegian affair, they were not justified. As soon as the Government had formulated its instructions, General Gamelin had hurried forward the forming and dispatch of the expeditionary force. The arrival of the transports was not his responsibility.

"In this particular case," M. Daladier declared, raising his voice a trifle, "the Generalissimo's conduct is worthy of nothing but praise. I am prepared to cover him fully in this matter," he added. "If he is guilty, then I am. I therefore place my resignation as a member of the Government at the disposal of the Prime Minister, who will thus be fully at liberty to proceed with such changes as he may think desirable."

There was complete silence. For some seconds, which seemed very long to those present, M. Reynaud, white-faced, appeared to be waiting for someone to speak. Then he slowly closed his file and said emphatically: "As I cannot make my point of view prevail, I am no longer Head of the Government."

The members of the Council, looking on at the duel between the two men, were aghast. If some, thinking of the national interest, were deeply grieved that an incurable lack of mutual comprehension made collaboration between the two impossible, most were chiefly anxious over their own fate. This dispute would mean a ministerial crisis, and what would become of them?

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

So it was with a sigh of relief that they heard the announcement that a Council of Ministers would take place on the following Tuesday. Five days gained.

A Minister who had come from the Cabinet Meeting sat at a table where I was having lunch. From his funereal expression it was evident that things had taken a turn for the worse. He was bombarded with questions and did his best to give nothing away.

One of the company said to him : " To look at you, one would think you were going to resign this evening ! "

" You're nearer the mark than you think," was the reply. " If it's not this evening, it will be to-morrow or Tuesday—*short of a miracle !* "

And what a miracle it would be !

## Chapter XX

### May 10th, 1940. Invasion of Holland and Belgium

THE HIGH COMMAND DECIDES TO RISK BATTLE IN BELGIUM  
—CABINET CHANGES : M. MARIN AND M. YBARNEGARAY  
JOIN THE MINISTRY—M. DALADIER'S ANXIETY—THE  
GENERALISSIMO'S HOUR—BANCO—MR. CHAMBERLAIN  
HANDS ON THE TORCH TO MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL

At dawn a rumour came hurtling through space. Waves carried it to all corners of the universe. In the course of the night Hitler had ordered his troops to invade Holland and Belgium. In Paris, at an equally early hour, special editions of the newspapers spread the news noisily from street to street and house to house. Faces were grave and looks anxious in the presence of this enormous question mark which rose up suddenly in the sky : "What will to-morrow bring ?" This time it was real war, this time it was the offensive so often announced, so often deferred ; so much desired by some, so much dreaded by others. What would to-morrow bring ? To-morrow ? To-morrow ?

It is all very well to be heavy of heart : even so one cannot remain mute indefinitely. Accordingly each put into words his confidence, his fear, or his terror.

"Anything's better than this inaction, which was sending the country and the army to sleep."

"Are we ready ? We still need another six months' preparation !"

"We're not ready yet. We shall be crushed to pulp !"

Then, as no one knew anything, everything grew blurred

in a waiting in which hope predominated. No one knew anything? Oh, yes! There were some people who knew. At general headquarters the Commander-in-Chief was issuing instructions drawn up in anticipation of the enemy deciding to adopt his *Kriegspiel* of invasion of Holland and Belgium.

At the front, each Commander opened the envelope determining the part to be played by the units under his orders in the present conjunction of events. Already French armies, the B.E.F., and motorised units had started off towards Holland and Belgium, whose governments had called to Great Britain and France for help.

At the Ministry of War a silent man had his eyes fixed on an immense map of the Western front. A choice of two plans presented itself. To accept the enemy's challenge and hurry to meet him in order to beat him back or hold him in check: risk of a great victory, risk of a great defeat. Alternatively, to allow him almost free rein in Belgium and await him in force on a defensive line, continuing from the end of the Maginot Line and based on the great river arteries of the Scheldt and the Meuse. This was a provisional plan of prudence. The High Command decided in favour of the risk. So did the Government. The Government had especially taken into account the sentimental reasons for maximum help for the Dutch and Belgian peoples. The Minister of War, M. Daladier, mistrustful by nature, wondered if he ought not to have banned the risky plan in favour of the prudent one.

At the Prime Minister's office, M. Paul Reynaud had been since early morning in great political activity. On the brink of resignation the day before, as we have seen, he would in all probability have actually had to resign on the following Tuesday. Now it was May 10th. Let us not forget that fact.

The day before, M. Reynaud and M. Daladier, violently at loggerheads over the question of the High Command

of the army, were about to be compelled to part company—short of a miracle, one of their colleagues had said.

The miracle—one with which M. Daladier and M. Paul Reynaud would gladly have dispensed—had come about through a wave of Hitler's wand. Now there could be no question of changing the Generalissimo. Whilst the latter set about going *banco* and M. Daladier pondered in front of a map on the worries bound up in making a choice and on the perils of a decision, M. Paul Reynaud, his nerves lashed by the event, busied himself with re-establishing his gravely threatened position as Prime Minister. As early as possible he conferred with the President of the Republic, who likewise had talks with M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot, Speakers, respectively, of the Senate and of the Chamber, and with Daladier and Mandel. To all of them M. Lebrun suggested broadening the Government in the direction of complete national unity.

All his interlocutors fell in with this view, but with differences. M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot advised the Head of the State to charge M. Reynaud personally with the widening of his ministerial platform. M. Daladier expressed the opinion that after the discussion at the Cabinet Council of the day before on the subject of the Generalissimo, M. Paul Reynaud was not qualified to effect such union. He said so, moreover, to M. Reynaud himself, who pretended to agree. But the President of the Republic, alarmed by the prospect of even a short crisis, pressed M. Paul Reynaud who, having already begun the necessary steps, continued them feverishly. He quickly realised the difficulties, so thoroughly, indeed, that, having started from scratch with the intention of re-fashioning almost his whole Cabinet and of calling even upon Laval, Piétri and Georges Bonnet, he confined himself to keeping the team he had and introducing two new members capable of giving his Government the character of a National Union. The new-comers were

M. Louis Marin, of the old classic Right, and M. Ybarnegaray, of the Parti Social Français, that is to say, the representative in the Chamber of the movement headed by Colonel de La Rocque.

M. Louis Marin was in Paris, so that was soon done. M. Ybarnegaray was in the Pyrenees. M. Paul Reynaud said to him over the telephone: "I'm making you a Minister of State." M. Ybarnegaray replied: "I cannot accept without my leader's authorisation. Ask La Rocque."

M. Reynaud got into touch with Colonel de La Rocque, who, on thinking things over, said to himself: "Here's a splendid opportunity to get the party 'out of bond.' I shall never find a better chance." And he gave his consent.\* Two days after, M. Paul Reynaud said to M. Ybarnegaray, who had come to Paris hot-foot: "I'm soon going to put it straight to Daladier that he must change over with me and go from the War Ministry to the Foreign Office. If he refuses, I shall give the Foreign Office to Chautemps and be rid of Daladier altogether."

At this time M. Marin and M. Ybarnegaray were looked upon as one hundred per cent. patriots. M. Marin would prove to the very end that his reputation was justified; M. Ybarnegaray that his depended on influences exerted upon his credulity. M. Reynaud provided me with confirmation of most of the above information early in the afternoon during an interview which, when he had arranged it with me, had clearly not had as its object a still problematical offensive. I was then anxious to talk to him about events in Norway. They already belonged to the past, and we only lingered long enough over them for him to say to me: "I've lived seven days and seven nights in agony."

He was certainly not exaggerating. The description given me of him at the Cabinet Meeting of the day before was quite accurate. He was worse than haggard. The

\* I had this remark from a thoroughly reliable friend of Colonel de La Rocque.

nervous mannerism peculiar to him—a jerky movement of the head from right to left—was more in evidence than usual. His voice was weary and the brilliance of his glance unhealthy.

“Are you altering your Ministry?”

“I was intending to. It was getting very difficult. On hearing of the offensive, the President asked me to form a Government of National Union. M. Daladier told the President—and me, too, for that matter—that he was quite of the opinion that a Government of National Union should be formed, but that after yesterday’s Council he did not think I was qualified to do it. I replied that I was of the same opinion, and that I was at once going to inform the President that I shared his point of view. But at the request of M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot the President continued to urge me and I yielded. However, in face of the difficulties of the undertaking I have confined myself to keeping the present men and taking on two new ones calculated to give the Ministry a character of National Union.”

“Are you taking Blum?”

“No. I’m keeping my Socialists and adding Marin and Ybarnegaray. You don’t approve?”

“Oh, yes! But will that be enough to satisfy public opinion?”

“Marin stands for the old Right; Ybarnegaray for the P.S.F., in other words, La Rocque, the Croix de Feu.”

“Yes, yes, of course, that’s true. I was forgetting. That’s quite right.”

“It seems to me that it meets the case. Besides, events compel us to go faster and faster. I am dispensing with the Under-Secretaries of State out of deference to the wishes of Jeanneney, who would have liked the circle drawn closer. I am only keeping two of them, of whom Baudouin naturally is one. I’m going to receive them presently and tell them of my decision. It won’t be a very pleasant conversation to have.”



" Obviously they won't be best pleased."

" Oh, well, it's wartime ! "

On leaving him, not without wishing with all my heart, and setting aside any question of individuals, that the avalanche which was beginning might come up against an indestructible French wall, I met in the ante-room the Minister who had been so depressed the day before after the Cabinet meeting. He had recovered his spirits a little—for the moment.

At the Ministry of War, M. Daladier was not nervous, but the furrows of great anxiety marked his forehead.

" I wanted to withdraw. I did not want to return to this Ministry. I should have done better to go. Now, in view of what's going on to-day, I can't desert. I am Minister of National Defence. Events will decide."

I went to see Mandel, the Minister of Colonies.

" The war's beginning," he told me gravely. Then, rather to himself than to me, he murmured : " There will be ups and downs, certainly reverses, perhaps disasters. We must hold out, hold out ! "

Seeing him rising above rivalries, aware of the terrible dangers we were going to run, uncertain of the strength of our military weapon, ready, for his part, to take any resolve and filled with the spirit of combat, I told myself that if that morning the President had had a real notion of the interests of France and of his duty, he would have given men and routine short shrift and imposed the task of forming the Government of the country on the former collaborator of Clemenceau, on the only statesman who, in this tragic period, was to preserve his balance and his faith.

" When we do come to that," I said to myself, " pray heaven that it won't be too late ! "

As I said good-bye, I asked : " What about Gamelin ? "

With his hand he sketched a large question mark in the air.

" We shall see him at work now ! "

It was, indeed, the Commander-in-Chief's hour! On what trifles things depend! If, at the Cabinet Meeting of the previous day at which M. Paul Reynaud had demanded Gamelin's head, M. Daladier had simply replied: "You are the leader—make your decision!" Gamelin would, the same evening, have handed over the sceptre of command to General Georges, who would have prevented nothing of what happened in the first days, and who was as much responsible for them as Gamelin, since it was more directly his duty to watch over the organisations and moral health of the armies. In that case, Gamelin would have found defenders to say: "Ah! If only they had kept Gamelin!"

Which would have been just as stupid as the incoherent remarks made to the Premier before witnesses in a fit of feminine fury: "Get rid of that Gamelin, get rid of him. If he wins it will all be your fault."

It was not if Gamelin had won that M. Reynaud would have been wholly to blame. The blame is his now because, having said that he would win the war, he is no longer in a position to win it, because he threw in his hand, because he ought to be in Algiers, Casablanca or London, galvanising the energies of the Empire for the reconquest of France.

Whatever one may think of this, the fact remains that the avalanche swept down on Belgium, on Holland, and then soon on France. Belgium and Holland, so long stubbornly opposed to making any compromise with the Allies, appealed for their aid. It was here, if I am to believe competent opinions, that the military fault was committed by Gamelin and the Governments of Paris and London. Help! Yes. But how? By moving into invaded territory, as we did, with our best armies, our motorised divisions, our tanks, with the B.E.F. and all its material? Or by taking a stand on the line of the Scheldt and keeping this whole military machine, which was, after all, formidable enough, as a reserve for another

offensive when, following an accident, a break through, such a reserve should proclaim itself indispensable?

Is it true that at general headquarters the staff congratulated themselves because the German attack was developing over ground and according to a plan which French G.H.Q. had carefully studied, and that they said: "They're coming where we're waiting for them?"

Did they think of a possible break through? And if they did, why did they decide as though it were impossible? Was it because the Generalissimo, who knew that for some weeks past he had been condemned in the mind of the head of the Government, was in some sort hypnotised by this threat, and lost his coolness and resource? Did he hearken to the voice of an ill-omened counsellor which said: "If you fight the battle you will probably win it and then you'll be saved!" Whereas if he had continued to be the "*Fabius Cunctator*"! But what is the good of theorising? Let us stick to the facts, whose truth probably conforms with the truth of conscience and intentions. Gamelin chose the strategy of the battle in Belgium. He staked everything on one throw. He raced towards his destiny, dragging us after him, with that culpable innocence against which Pascal put humanity on guard in his *Pensées* when he wrote of us all, wretched little atoms on the vast earth: "*We all run heedlessly into the precipice after putting something in front of us to prevent us seeing it.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile in London, with a touching dignity by which he showed himself equal to the magnificent history of his country, Mr. Chamberlain handed over the torch and the rudder to the man who would henceforth personify for the British Empire at War the will to win. For years, Winston Churchill had been the Demosthenes who cried shame on his compatriots for their childish optimism, whilst others—like ourselves—cried the same thing to the

French but with less resonance. He hurled his imprecations, like the Greek at the Athenians, and shouted to them as he announced the coming of the great peril: "What are you waiting for? An Event? Necessity? Then what is going on before your eyes?"

In his turn, somewhat late, but not too late, the Necessity, the Event, called him. Beyond the Rhine, Hitler, engendered by centuries of Germanic violence to be the symbol of Conquering Barbarism, showed to his own legions little Belgium, peaceful Holland, and the old French enemy, and shrieked: "Onward! There lies the spoil!"

And, carried away by a hysteria of domination, he prophesied for them, their children, their grandchildren, and all the generations to come, a thousand years of peace; in other words, perpetual hegemony.

May 10th, 1940. What a date!

## Chapter XXI

### The Panic of May 16th

M. DALADIER'S UNEASINESS—THE FRONT IS BROKEN—THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, OVERCOME, LETS LOOSE A WAVE OF PANIC—UNEXAMPLED SCENES AT A CABINET MEETING ATTENDED BY THE SPEAKERS OF THE TWO HOUSES—M. PAUL REYNAUD RECOVERS HIMSELF—SITTING OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES—"WE SHALL FIGHT BEFORE PARIS, IN PARIS!"—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S VISIT: "WE SHALL BE WITH YOU TO THE END"

"THERE will be ups and downs, reverses, perhaps disasters," M. Mandel had warned us. But he certainly did not think that his prediction would be as rapidly confirmed by the event as it was. He made it on Friday, May 10th, the day the offensive began. On Saturday, May 11th, and Sunday, May 12th, no disturbing pieces of information were yet forthcoming. On the thirteenth bits of bad news began to find their way through the censorship, but as yet they did not cause anxiety, firstly because they were vague, and secondly because no one expected Dutch resistance to be more than a hindrance and a delay to the German advance. In actual fact, given the military weakness of this little country, it was to last long enough for one to be able to say that Queen Wilhelmina had saved the honour of her house and her country. If people knew in advance that the occupation of Luxembourg was inevitable, they expected the army of Belgium to hold the German troops for some days on the Albert Canal. This it did not

succeed in doing, but duly fell back on to the Antwerp-Namur line. This disappointment, unpleasant though it was, did not pave the way for others which, during the next and following days, were to test the coolness of the High Command and the firmness of soul of the Government.

In the afternoon of this Monday (May 13th), M. Daladier's face bore the expression familiar to it on bad days. Someone asked him timidly: "Are you satisfied with the way the offensive begun is developing?"

A large map of the battle-front stood on an easel. His glance went from the North Sea to the Maginot Line, and he shook his head.

"I'm not at all satisfied. I was wrong to allow myself to be carried away into sending so many of our troops to Belgium. I didn't want to. I ought to have followed my presentiment. From the moment they failed to call on us before the offensive, it became too big a risk. We are compelled to fall back, and I am not easy in my mind."

After a pause he yielded, perhaps to some maternal memory:

"I am not a believer, but if we win this battle, I shall certainly say a word or two of prayer."

On the next day, the fourteenth, bad news reached me. Not to speak of the tales, always disadvantageous, brought by Belgian refugees who had had to endure bombing from enemy planes on the open road, there was the fact that motorised divisions had succeeded in crossing the Meuse at several points. A War Council was summoned, and the Minister of National Defence explained the situation without dramatising it, but also without minimising it.

As for the public, they knew and could foresee nothing. From what I learned from scraps of information the people might be scared at a moment's notice by an accident which might prove far too complete a surprise for them. It was necessary to put them on their guard. Responsible as I was, to more than a million readers who were accustomed to rely on the level-headedness of a paper which,

because it was well documented, passed for being semi-official, though it was not, I made up my mind to do so.

I ask pardon for thrusting myself forward, but the two extracts which I am going to reproduce from an article which appeared under my signature in the *Petit Parisien* of May 15th, 1940, have, in my opinion, the importance of a fact which will serve to explain others.

It was only right that we should note the extraordinary power of the German offensive, "*long prepared and provided with exceptional means of destruction*," which was breaking against our borders "with the strength of an untamed element."

As attenuating circumstances to much-dreaded events, we must recall that neither France nor England, still less Belgium and Holland, were in a state of preparation equal to that of the enemy.

To oppose this offensive "there is France, less well prepared certainly, because she has been tardy in seeing and realising the threat of the scourge. There is the French army, less numerous, no doubt, and lacking as yet all the engines of attack that the invader has accumulated.

"There is the British army which is not yet at the pitch of strength that it will acquire, for our Allies have been too long in reconciling themselves to the necessity of conscription. There are Belgian and Dutch contingents. Our neighbours—alas!—have not understood the lesson of the other war.

"They appealed to us when the enemy had already all the advantages of attack and preparation—too late! Had they done so sooner, before the Germans put into execution plans long known and decided upon, Hitler's enterprise could have been nipped in the bud."

Lastly, our duty was to take good note that "if tomorrow we had to experience some of the misfortunes which in 1914 weighed down the balance of victory momentarily on the side of the aggressor—who was the same as before and whom we had been foolish enough not to render

permanently incapable of harming us—no Frenchman would despair, no Frenchman could despair, whatever might be the vicissitudes of the days, months, perhaps of the years, to come.”

The next morning, that was May 15th, a politician of importance rang me up to say: “You’ve had the pluck to bring the truth to light. It will be every bit as harsh as you gave your readers to understand.”

In the course of the day a Council of Ministers was held at the Elysée, and the Minister of National Defence had the sorrowful task of announcing that the front had been broken on the Meuse between Namur and Dinant. The divisions which had given way were commanded by General Corap. He was relieved of his command, and General Giraud, one of the hopes of the French army, received orders to leave Antwerp to go and restore the situation on the Meuse.

In parenthesis, I note here by way of record that at this same Council a most confused discussion took place over Italy’s entry into the war, which was considered imminent.

One of the Ministers went one better than the most rabid Italophiles by proposing that offers should be made to Italy.

“We might,” he opined, “offer her the internationalising of Gibraltar.”

Someone with a sense of humour put an end to the controversy with these few words:

“It seems to me that you want to offer something that isn’t yours. I can’t imagine, or, rather, I can imagine only too well, what the English would have to say when they heard of your suggestion!”

But this was only a joke in comparison with what was going on at G.H.Q. I wasn’t there, and it needs an effort of imagination to dream of what was happening there.

General Gamelin, let us remember, had gone banco. And he had lost.



He had been Joffre's collaborator at the time of the Battle of the Marne. Would he show himself a Joffre? It is not easy to be a Joffre.

Gamelin would show that it takes a Hercules to bend his back in face of an unfavourable destiny: to go back while continuing to face up to the enemy: to remain deaf to reproaches, advice and questions: not to stop except at the point fixed in the mind, and, when this point is reached, to command that it should not be passed by so little as a centimetre.

"Halt! Face to the Enemy!" Perhaps Gamelin said that to himself. Yes. But Joffre had Gallieni, Maunoury, Foch, Lanrezac, Castelnau, Franchet d'Esperey, Sarrail!

Is it quite certain that he could not have had them if he had known where to find them? No! He didn't say that to himself. He went to battle as though he were going to a casino. And he staked everything on a single card.

Telegrams bringing despair and telephone calls that struck mortal blows overwhelmed him.

He had neither Joffre's back and big sapper's head, nor Gallieni's eagle glance, nor Foch's imagination. He had not the reflexes of the leader, but only those of a very intelligent, over-pliable, invertebrate, characterless military official, whose will power had been debased by twenty years of Government form and political pettifogging.

"The front is broken! The German motorised divisions are on the road to Paris. Nothing will stop them."

That is what he announced to the Government on the night of May 15th-16th, advising it to leave the capital.

It was M. Roy, Minister of the Interior at this date, who received the Generalissimo's message. That was enough to disturb even an old veteran's night.

M. Roy endeavoured to get in touch with the Head of the Government. The poor man found it a troublesome business. Orders had been given that M. Reynaud's rest was not to be interrupted, and none of his intimates would

say where he could be found. At last the Minister lost his temper, and was able eventually to communicate the incredible news to M. Reynaud.

Ah! That day of May 16th, especially that morning!

The news spread in fragments, no one knew exactly how, like bits of a big shell falling about one's ears.

"Rethel has been overrun."

"The Germans are at Laon."

"They'll be in Paris this evening."

"Herriot said to a friend: 'Before two o'clock I advise you to leave Paris.'"

"The sitting of the Chamber has been cancelled."

It was rumours of that kind with which we were harassed. In the form they were bandied about they were false. But there was a basis of truth underneath.

This much was true: on May 16th Parliament was to reassemble after the recess, and a sitting was announced for three o'clock. Warned by M. Paul Reynaud and summoned to his official quarters, M. Herriot, Speaker of the Chamber, and M. Jeanneney, Speaker of the Senate, there met the whole body of Ministers. M. Herriot had left the Palais Bourbon leaving his colleagues in doubt over the possible adjournment of the sitting, which, added to the other rumours, allowed all manner of suppositions to be set afoot.

At the Ministry of Information, where, whatever people might say, there really was a little information available occasionally, a far-seeing Minister had said to certain of his collaborators as he set off to join his colleagues at the Quai d'Orsay: "*Perhaps circumstances will lead us to leave Paris soon. Who knows? This evening. . . . I'll let you know. Then we shall have to tell the newspapers that they must withdraw to the provinces.*"

The newspapers were told fast enough. General confusion. Everyone was agog with the news, and it was not all just a yarn.

Two members of the Government were to have had

lunch in a friend's house. Both begged to be excused. One of them, M. Lamoureux, was asked over the telephone : " Is it true that the evacuation of the Government departments is imminent ? "

" Perfectly. They're fighting in front of Paris. We must go. It's urgent."

That was how the morning was, seen from outside. Seen from inside the Government, it was in broad outline like this. The Generalissimo, greatly alarmed, had alarmed the Premier, who had alarmed the President, the two Speakers, and his colleagues ; who, in their turn, had alarmed some thousands of officials, journalists and friends ; who, for their part, had taken it upon themselves to alarm sufficient people to produce, when all was added together, what is properly called a panic.

The sitting of the Council was a sight which will never be forgotten by those of the men present who had retained their self-control.

A Generalissimo, hopelessly at sea, who declared : " I made a mistake. I thought the instrument was sound, but it bent. Divisions fled without fighting, a battalion of tanks would not move, etc., etc."

A Premier who showed spirit, but who grew excited and on edge ; a Finance Minister who gave advice without being asked for it ; a President of the Republic who had a telephone call made every half-hour to find out what time his wife and household staff were to leave ; an endless discussion over whether the Chamber should meet, carried on to such purpose that, when the Council broke up, no one knew if the sitting would be held or not. Sometimes they nearly all talked at once ; at other moments there was the silence of terror. Meanwhile, in an adjoining room a haggard-eyed woman was a prey to a fit of hysterics.

A discussion arose about the possible creation of a kind of super-government, comprising the two Speakers and certain men of resolute will, with Marshal Pétain at the head.

The Speaker of the Senate replied : " If there is a duty to fulfil, I will do whatever you may decide."

But the Speaker of the Chamber objected : " Yes. But would it be constitutional ? We must think it over."

And, finally, should the Government leave Paris or not ?

They endeavoured to stir up the Commander-in-Chief. They told him that he must try to hold his ground. Try ! Then they would see what was to be done.

Still, they decided to requisition the necessary number of cars and lorries, which would be ready to remove everything at the first signal. The Ministerial staffs hastened to get their things together. They would be ready against the following month.

In his first hours of utter confusion did M. Paul Reynaud really give the order at the Foreign Office, or was he misunderstood ? At all events, orders were passed on to his staff to burn the archives. Fortunately they were only executed tardily and countermanded before everything was destroyed.

At the Council Meeting, M. Daladier, who had spent the night in his office in contact with his staff and with G.H.Q., showed signs of fatigue, but he was self-possessed, and maintained that if the Government decided to leave, the Ministers of National Defence should remain provisionally in Paris. M. Chautemps asked surreptitiously if they were going to join the Queen of Holland in England, and someone who overheard murmured : " Not yet ! "

M. Dautry had become once more the leader he had been when in charge of the State Railway, precise, orderly of mind, cool and resolute. Mandel, as usual, caused amazement by his entire self-control. " What a man ! " one of his colleagues said to me. " What a pity he's not Prime Minister ! "

M. Paul Reynaud, at first crushed, had recovered himself. He decided to go to the Chamber, where he made a short statement, which revealed and aroused emotion, a speech of the kind needed at that moment containing words

appropriate to the general anguish. I cannot re-read it without grief: "*The days, the weeks, the months ahead will forge centuries of our future. . . . One thing alone counts: to uphold France. No weakness can be allowed: there can be but one penalty, death.*"

That evening, over the radio, he renewed his declaration in different words, swearing that it was when *all seemed lost that the world would see of what France was capable.*

I met him at the Foreign Office as he was returning from the Palais Bourbon. He looked like a man taxed to the uttermost by fatigue, distress and responsibilities, but he was standing up to the storm.

We were face to face—it was in his office—and by way of beginning the conversation, I asked: "*Is it true that the newspapers are to withdraw to the provinces?*"

"Who said anything so crazy?"

"The Ministry of Information."

"It's stupid! We shall fight before Paris; we shall fight in Paris, if need be!"

"Thank you," I said. "That's all I wanted to know."

The Paul Reynaud who spoke thus was the man who, whatever might be his infirmities of mind and head, had at times the ambition to be the victorious leader.

His misfortune and ours would be that one day—the essential day, alas!—this ambition would eventually bend beneath the slow pressure of a will with an imperious face.

As I left him, I said: "Gamelin?" He raised his arms with a gesture of indignant grief. "Weygand?" I continued. "They told me——"

"Perhaps."

The Generalissimo had returned to his G.H.Q. He was going to "*try*" to make a stand, as he had been asked. What was the good of asking him to try when he had lost his faith and had just said: "The instrument was not sound?"

"The instrument was not sound!" What an appalling statement!

Why wasn't it sound? There is no single answer. There are many answers, because there are responsibilities in many quarters for it. Some concern the whole of French politics since the victory of 1918, all the Governments, all the War Ministers, all the Commanders-in-Chief, and all the Generals who have followed one another, and the list includes great names—Pétain, Weygand. Others have to do with the morals of the nation in arms since the mobilisation. That prolonged waiting not only in the dug-outs of the Maginot Line, but also on the straw of improvised billets, did not only have the salutary effect of allowing the amassing of stores, tanks, guns, planes, according to M. Daladier's wish; it had another, weakening effect, sapping the spirit of officers and men alike and making them receptive to demoralising propaganda. Divisions took to flight, tank battalions turned about . . . because they did not want to fight? And nothing was known of their state of mind? Was it that they were surprised by the German tactics? Had there, then, been no time to instruct them in it since the "Competent Authorities" had been informed by Polish officers who had been the victims of these tactics? And by Colonel de Gaulle, let us not forget!

"The instrument was not sound!" The Commander-in-Chief regained enough of the soul of the Marne to issue an Order of the Day to the troops: "Conquer or die!"

No. Conquering or dying was not the thought that was required. It should have been: "Die, if need be; but first of all, conquer."

That, I imagine, is what at the close of this sinister day Winston Churchill, who was but newly-placed at the helm of the British ship of state and who had flown to Paris, would say to Reynaud, Daladier and Mandel, imparting to them something of his flame, his dynamism, his indomitable resolution.

When, as excuses, a certain number of the criminal

weaknesses in Belgium and France were invoked, he exclaimed: "How many of them have you shot?"

In a private conversation M. Mandel did not fail to be more explicit than anyone else and to disclose to the British Premier the tragic truth, as it emerged from the news received in the course of the past few hours.

If one had to sum up Mr. Winston Churchill's words in a single sentence, it might, I think, be this: "*We shall be with you to the end!*"

## Chapter XXII

### Georges Mandel

M. PAUL REYNAUD MAKES CHANGES IN HIS CABINET—  
PÉTAİN IS CALLED UPON TO SERVE AS "COVER"—  
M. REYNAUD DECIDES TO BECOME WAR MINISTER—  
M. DALADIER GOES TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE, M. MANDEL  
TO THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR—THE LIFE OF  
M. MANDEL—THE RIGHT-HAND MAN OF GEORGES  
CLEMENCEAU—HOW GEORGES MANDEL FACED A HOSTILE  
CABAL IN 1936

IN the course of the month extending from this 16th of May, in which the wind of catastrophe whirled above his head, to the 16th of June, when he would collapse in face of the decisive effort, M. Paul Reynaud laboured, unhappily in fits and starts, but with prodigious energy and a courage worthy of success, to rescue his country—and ours—from an apparently hopeless situation, and his efforts were also marked, alas, by fatal errors, unjust and useless cruelties and by sometimes irreparable blunders.

As early as the next day he set about the refashioning of his Ministry. For a long while, as I have explained, he had been wanting to change places with M. Daladier and take over the Ministry of War and National Defence, in order to concentrate in one hand, as he would announce in a communiqué: "The political and military conduct of the war."

Hitherto M. Daladier had refused. He had so superstitious a horror of the Quai d'Orsay where he had experienced the agonies of the week of February 6th, 1934, that he had hardly ever set foot in it when he was both



Minister of War and Minister for Foreign Affairs at the same time. It was always at the Rue St. Dominique that he lived and received Ambassadors. This antipathy had much to do with the obstinacy he always showed to those of his friends, myself among them, who urged him to give up the portfolio of War Minister in order to devote himself to foreign policy.

As we know, too, he made it a regular point of honour to stay where he was, M. Reynaud having displayed a hostile relentlessness instead of a friendly and accommodating spirit in endeavouring to dislodge him from the Rue St. Dominique. M. Daladier would, perhaps, have agreed to abandon his Office, but it would have been, as we are already in a position to realise, in order to leave the Government altogether.

But the collapse of General Gamelin no longer left him the same liberty of movement. If he refused to move to the Quai d'Orsay, the Premier would be well placed for disregarding him, and dispensing with his assistance in the Cabinet altogether. It cost M. Daladier much self-sacrifice to resign himself to this interchange which, as things were, looked like a falling off in his power, whereas, a fortnight before it would have seemed an act of condescension on his part. He considered also, no doubt, that by remaining in the Cabinet, even in an uncongenial post, he would be better able to defend himself against the campaign which was beginning to develop against him, and which both M. Paul Reynaud and his circle fomented to the best of their ability.

Moreover, in the event of M. Daladier again refusing, M. Paul Reynaud was resolved to call upon someone else to take over the Foreign Office. He had pronounced the name of Chautemps, who, Vice-Premier without portfolio, would have asked nothing better, but M. Camille Chautemps' clearly established defeatism had caused the President of the Republic to pull a wry face. He had likewise mentioned the name of Marshal Pétain, only to

be told sourly: "That won't be the way to get rid of Léger, who has managed to get him on his side."

So it would be purely and simply the cherished Paul Baudouin, still for a fortnight to be confined in an undistinguished under-secretaryship. Meanwhile, until M. Daladier's consent should be extracted, not without pain, M. Paul Reynaud arranged three other operations. One, purely decorative, would be to ask Marshal Pétain to accept a Ministry of State with the title of Vice-President of the Council. In the eyes of the public, for whom the name of Pétain remained immutably attached to the defence of Verdun in 1916, the Marshal's nomination would be the ideal *cover*, the one that M. Herriot had not been able to procure for himself when M. Daladier had offered him the position of Foreign Minister in September, 1939; the one above all that M. Laval wanted to keep in reserve for himself against the time when his hour should have struck. Furthermore, the Marshal's entry would make a vacancy at Madrid and would be the starting point for the promised diplomatic movement. What a magnificent treble to his credit! M. Reynaud thought exultantly, despite the critical nature of the moment.

The second operation would consist in obtaining M. Mandel's consent, in view of the exceptional circumstances, to accept the Ministry of the Interior, while the third would be the definite shelving of General Gamelin and his replacement at the head of the armies by General Weygand.

Pétain—Weygand—Mandel, all choices calculated for different reasons to inspire confidence in the nation at a period when the military situation remained constantly disquieting.

Marshal Pétain replied "Present!" without a shadow of hesitation. During a previous visit to Paris he had given it to be understood that he would be perfectly ready to fill a Governmental post, in the capacity of a Nestor, especially one concerned with safeguarding the morale of the troops. At this time, before old age and

flattery had extinguished in him the last gleams of the critical faculty, he realised that he could not assume too heavy a task.

Weygand—he stood for the epic of the other war—Weygand stood for Foch. They sent for him. He would come.

In view of what was happening and what threatened, M. Mandel did not dream of evading the Premier's request, and the announcement of his appointment as Minister of the Interior gave rise to a great stir of curiosity, fear, and confidence: curiosity on the part of those whom this person of enigmatic countenance interested deeply as an exceptional being; fear among those against whom, if necessity required it, a firmness rendered implacable by patriotism might well exert itself; confidence for those that had faith in the man who, for thirty years and, more particularly, during the troubled but heroic period of 1917-1919, had been the collaborator, direct, constant and devoted to the point of total self-abnegation, of Georges Clemenceau.

The memory of this collaboration, at least as much as the qualities of leadership he had displayed as Postmaster-General and as Minister for the Colonies, together with his progressive ascent towards the highest Government offices, encouraged the hope that at the proper time he would be the providential man.

Georges Mandel provides the finest example I know of what will-power at the service of a lucid and acute intelligence can achieve. In the course of his life he had given—which is, perhaps, unprecedented—a double illustration of this, by performing the prodigious feat of being not only a man whom nothing, neither flattery, threats, nor violence, had ever diverted from the goal he had set himself to attain, but of being also the man who had learned, in contact with life and in the light of the lesson of experience, to conquer himself by toning down an ardent resolve which might in his early days have passed for arrogance,

a pugnacity which bore some of the aspects of cruelty, and a self-mastery which was looked on by some rather as a formidable power of dissembling.

When he made a start, quite young, before he was twenty, he was the object of jokes which amounted to nothing short of persecution on the part of the associates of Georges Clemenceau, whom he admired and to whose fortune he had sworn to attach himself by serving him.

Georges Clemenceau was not a gentle person. He was harsh towards the young Jew, whose clothes, ties and bearing gave him something of the air of a doctrinaire of 1830. He snubbed him, sometimes humiliated him. Millions of others would have been discouraged. Georges Mandel came back next day ; he would come back every day. He would make himself indispensable, whether on the staff of the *Aurore* in the thick of the Dreyfus case, or at the Ministry of the Interior, where he was the first to arrive and the last to leave ; whether in the Rue Franklin, in the Senate, or at the offices of the *Homme Libre* when Clemenceau was no longer in power. He anticipated the desires of the master. He saved him the necessity of reading the papers, the gist of which he summed up for him. He informed him of all that was said at the Palais Bourbon and the Luxembourg—which involved him in mishaps that he received with cool courage.

He kept an eye on the adversaries, he counteracted their intrigues by others of his own, he sought to discover their faults, vices and plans in order to be the better able to overthrow them. All this was not without the effect of earning him more hatred, which he set at defiance, than it did friendship.

Sometimes the god he served with too much zeal would grow vexed and disown him, showing perhaps a certain sadism in testing his loyalty by a deliberate ferocity, which it would be easy to illustrate with piquant anecdotes. But Georges Mandel had encased himself for good in an armour of insensitivity, his devotion which was an integral

part of his personal policy, once decided, would never falter.

In 1917, when the great task devolved upon Georges Clemenceau, Mandel was at his side in the front rank. It is true that the Premier had General Mordacq as Director of the Military Cabinet, and Jeanneney as Under-Secretary of State, not to mention the great heads of all the important State departments, but Georges Mandel was there, unseen but ever present. Throughout the war of 1914-1918, and until the retirement of Georges Clemenceau, he was a regular "Grey Eminence," something like a new version of Richelieu's Père Joseph three hundred years after the original. It was on him that all internal politics depended. He displayed in his task all the resources of a Machiavellism stimulated by the greatness of the rôle he played, and he savoured all the joys of a despotism of which the end—victory—would purify the injustices and consecrate the legitimacy.

During this period, as he well knew, Georges Mandel had not always been happy and equitable in his acts, his words, his enmities and his cruelties, of which men that I loved, like Aristide Briand and Paul Painlevé, were victims. That, alas, was the ransom the struggle extorted. But it all melted away in the flame of patriotism, and, if the friendship which has united us for several years is so warm and so trusting, it is certainly partly because, as soon as the German peril reappeared over the horizon as an ever-growing threat, we overcame the bitterness of a few unhappy memories. Our great dead made their grave voices heard: "France comes first!" I was then able to appreciate the often hidden intrinsic worth of this great Frenchman, and his sense of authority, of order, and of the nation. From having been, as it were, the permanent shadow of the giant who was Georges Clemenceau, Georges Mandel has inherited an imperturbable faith in the destinies of the country, through the sieve of which he passes everything.

With the years his silhouette has changed somewhat. If he has still the piercing look of two eyes blue as pure steel, if the thin lips have always a stinging rejoinder ready, if the jutting chin still expresses doubt and disapproval with a simultaneous movement of the cheeks, the body has lost something of its slimness. In repose, the man who in 1900 had a head *à la Royer-Collard*, now rather puts one in mind of some canon who has strayed into secular life. The angles of his character have likewise been smoothed off. He has not lost his vitality in the rib-digging and good-fellowship of Parliamentary life. But his patriotic sense and his skill in using the lobbies as a field for manoeuvre have increased at the expense of an earlier harshness, and he has brought to the task of disarming antipathy incomparable tenacity and patience.

But let there be no mistake. None of the springs of his courage has weakened. He is still the man who, in June, 1936, stood up to a riot let loose on the day he handed over the office of Postmaster-General to a certain Jardillier.

As Postmaster-General M. Mandel had applied himself to bringing order into places where it had never reigned.

That sometimes his hand was heavy and that certain injustices mingled with salutary reforms is as probable as inevitable, but, on the whole, his stewardship had been beneficent and the public felt grateful to him. But a group of malcontents were anxious to pay him out for it. In agreement with the new Minister whom M. Blum, in appointing him, had decidedly not commissioned to have a hand in this little infamy, they organised what might be termed a running the gauntlet.

M. Mandel had been warned of it, but his physical courage was equal to his moral, and he refused to sneak out by a back door. He received his successor for the formality of officially handing over office to him. Then he left.

Under the eyes of M. Jardillier, who was laughing and stirring up his supporters, M. Mandel emerged and walked down the steps between two lines of hooligans who insulted

him, spat in his face, struck him with their fists, kicked him and crushed his hat.

A Counsellor of State named Decos—presumably he is now a "Baudouinist"—was heard to shout almost in his face: "We've given it to you all right, you old swine!"

Georges Mandel, undaunted, bowed and said icily: "Thank you, sir!"

The descent had been going on nearly twenty minutes beneath the amused gaze of M. Jardillier. M. Mandel's associates, whom he had forbidden to accompany him, decided to disobey his orders. Forcing their way up to him with thrusts of the elbows, they managed to clear a way for him to his car, about which in the courtyard hundreds of wretches were massed gesticulating and shouting to revenge themselves on the man who had compelled them to discharge their duties conscientiously.

When he went from the Colonial Office to the Ministry of the Interior, M. Mandel left behind him the evidence of a considerable achievement. He had taken the *French Empire* seriously. He had attached to himself a first-rate officer, General Buhrer, in order to bring hurrying from the colonies legions which were to have come in progressively increasing numbers to defend the Mother Country.

Since the beginning of the war he was the man who had held out the most hope of conducting it with ferocious vigour, against the internal as well as the external enemy. It was with the internal enemy that M. Mandel would now be at grips. Unfortunately, events would move too fast.

On the day he accepted the position of Minister of the Interior I said to him after we had meditated for some minutes on the tragedy which was beginning: "It will end by you being in charge."

He answered:

"You agree that the war will last a long time, unless there's a shameful peace. And I shall have no hand in that. So there's time. Let us do our work as Frenchmen."

## Chapter XXIII

### M. Léger is Hounded from Office

THE PORTES-BAUDOUIN INTRIGUE PROVES TOO STRONG  
FOR M. PAUL REYNAUD TO RESIST—FIRST BREACH IN  
THE FRANCO-BRITISH ALLIANCE—A COMMENT BY SIGNOR  
GUARIGLIA

ON the evening of May 18th, M. Paul Reynaud was exhausted, uneasy, and satisfied. He was living through terribly hard days. But uneasy and satisfied? The contradiction is only apparent. He could not fail to be uneasy, alas! It is true that the German motorised divisions had not made a fresh leap towards Paris. They were neglecting for the moment these advances on the capital, the German aim, seemingly, being to reach the French ports opposite Great Britain before pursuing the drive towards the heart of France.

M. Paul Reynaud had been to G.H.Q. General Gamelin who was continuing to direct the operations—if the word *direct* could still be applied—learned that General Weygand was on the way. It appeared that diplomatic advances to President Roosevelt were under consideration. But everything was black and more than uncertain.

If M. Reynaud was satisfied, therefore, it was solely with his ministerial operations.

The list of names forming the refashioned Government was published with a flourish of trumpets. It was announced at the same time that an important diplomatic move would be in evidence very shortly. Next morning Paul Reynaud would have big headlines in the papers. He might well rest triumphant.



But not yet. He would not be allowed to leave the Foreign Office without having settled the question of Alexis Léger.

Mme. de Portes and Paul Baudouin had modified their plan. They talked no more of sending M. Léger to London—this would be too complicated—nor of replacing him by M. Baudouin himself.

M. Daladier had been dislodged from the Rue St. Dominique. That was merely the first stage. Advantage would be taken of a fresh defeat to eject him from the Government altogether. The post thus vacated would fall to M. Baudouin. It only remained to appoint some accommodating Ambassador as Secretary-General. M. Charles Roux would like nothing better. They would telephone to him. But action must be taken swiftly and everybody confronted with an accomplished fact.

If Caillaux protested, well, they would see. As for Léger, it was now only a matter of sending him to Washington with the special mission of drawing the United States into the war. He could not succeed, and the gain would be twofold. His mission would be a failure and they would be rid of him for ever. If he refused, well, so much the worse for him. He could wait for better days.

They didn't put it to Paul Reynaud quite as crudely as that. Once again political interest was invoked. The superseding of Alexis Léger would prove, they pointed out, that the Premier had authority and could show determination. No one would venture to criticise the decision and, if anybody did, the censorship would forbid its publication. Besides, what would M. Léger have to complain of? They would suggest that he should go to Washington with the definite programme of bringing the United States into the war. What finer mission could a diplomat have?

Reynaud weakened. The plan was well designed.

"I have prepared a decree appointing his successor," said Paul Baudouin.

"Oh?" said Reynaud inquiringly.

"Charles Roux."

"Will he accept?"

"Yes. We've telephoned to him."

The Prime Minister was in the presence of wills stronger than his own. Yet he hesitated.

"All the same, I must see that Daladier agrees to this. I said no more than a vague word or two about it at G.H.Q. We mustn't forget that he is Foreign Secretary now."

"He isn't yet. The decree won't appear in the official gazette until to-morrow. You're still Foreign Minister."

"Yes. But one has to consider what's fitting."

"Seeing how things are with Daladier, there's no point in our putting ourselves out over etiquette."

Obscurely ill at ease in the depths of his hidden conscience, Reynaud cast round for objections.

He remembered what Mandel had said to him: "If you change the Secretary-General of the Foreign Office, people will take it for a disavowal of the policy they ascribe to Léger, namely, the policy of resistance to Germany and of active conduct of the war."

On the other hand, little given to sentiment though he is, M. Paul Reynaud realised that he was being asked to commit a despicable action towards a man with whom he had hitherto had friendly relations and who symbolised the same policy as himself. He had had no disagreement with him; not so much as an argument. Since he had been at the Quai d'Orsay he had been able to see the Secretary-General working night and day, assuming responsibilities, removing all difficulties from his path, taking useful steps on his own initiative. At least he ought to warn him, have a talk with him, and venture to say: "We must separate!" He dreaded this interview and his companions did not want him to have it, either. Léger might be quite capable of getting round him, perhaps of making him ashamed!

"We're at war!" they whispered to him. "It's not a time to bother about sparing anyone's feelings. The safety of the country is the only law——"

The argument was too blatant. They had gone too far. Paul Reynaud's dignity asserted itself. Then they touched him on his weak spot.

"It's not your business to explain matters to Léger. That is for M. Daladier who, as you very excellently said, is Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is already, and you are still. You take the decision and he informs the person concerned of it."

The solution pleased the Prime Minister, whose assurance boggled at the prospect of facing his future victim.

The two men, Reynaud and Daladier, would have a tussle over which of the two should land the other with the odium of an action imposed on the Premier by his clique and against which, borne down by circumstances, he no longer felt capable of rebelling.

Paul Reynaud duly told the story that had been dinned into him. It was necessary to send an ambassador of outstanding authority to Washington in order to lead the United States into coming to our help. A politician would be too conspicuous. The man most clearly indicated for the position by his office and his reputation was Léger.

Daladier controlled an instinctive movement—oh! not of surprise! For some days he had been saying to those about him: "Reynaud is going to get rid of Léger. You'll see. Baudouin wants his post."

His movement then was merely a reaction against the shoddiness of the proceedings. He confined himself to saying: "Do you think he will accept?"

"It's a great mission to fulfil, to persuade Roosevelt to save France."

"Certainly. It's great, but difficult."

"Yes. So no one has a better chance of succeeding than he."

"And you're replacing him by?"

" Charles Roux—unless you prefer—— ? "

" No, no. Charles Roux ? I see. Good. On account of the Vatican. Obviously, Caillaux won't be best pleased." Reynaud made a gesture of contempt.

" Then—er—you will let Léger know ? "

And he went away.

Alexis suspected nothing. He was fully aware of the good intentions of M. Baudouin, who shook his hand tepidly and averted his gaze when they met in the Premier's Cabinet room, and of Mme. de Portes, who stabbed him with a glance at the same moment as she welcomed him with : " Good morning, Alexis ! " or " Good-day, Léger ! "

But since Reynaud was vacating the Quai d'Orsay in favour of Daladier, he might well think himself safe from their enterprises and their malice. He was in this frame of mind when he joined M. Daladier in the principal room of the Ministry for an official renewal of contact. I imagine that M. Léger felt a trifle ill at ease, for it was not in these conditions that he had wished that M. Daladier would come and install himself at the Quai d'Orsay, when he begged him to leave the War Ministry for the Foreign Office. The position was still more uncomfortable for Daladier. How could he announce M. Paul Reynaud's decision ?

Cautiously he explored the ground.

" Well, my dear Léger, do you remember my repulsion, when you extolled Paul Reynaud's worth to me and urged me to give him ministerial promotion, suggesting him for the Ministry of War, or of Armament, or for the Foreign Office ? Well, do you know what he has just said to me ? He is anxious to induce you to give up your post of Secretary-General and thinks of sending you to Washington. He claims that you're the only person who will manage to bring the United States into the war on our side. He's spoken to you about it, hasn't he ? "

If I remember aright what M. Daladier told me of this interview, M. Léger did not appear to have been informed

of M. Reynaud's project in any way. No tinge of colour stained his pale cheeks. His eyelashes did not quiver. He did no more than protest in his level tones that when the day came for him to vacate his post he would not consent to fill any other. As for Washington, it was a joke to suppose that it was possible to bring the United States into the war—now, at all events, even supposing that such an eventuality could be hoped for in the future.

M. Daladier did not take it upon himself to advance any further on this more than difficult ground. When M. Léger left his official room late in the evening he pondered, perhaps, on the fragility of human friendships and on the egoism of politicians, but he did not think that already he had ceased to be Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

His conscience set free by his conversation with M. Daladier, M. Paul Reynaud took the pen put into his hand and scrawled his arrogant signature at the foot of the decree appointing M. Charles Roux to the post of M. Léger, who had been called to fulfil other duties. Have you never considered M. Paul Reynaud's signature? It is part and parcel of the man himself. Hastily a messenger dashed off to see the President of the Republic. Any intervention must be forestalled. M. Albert Lebrun wondered what all this meant, and was given to believe that it was to do with a great diplomatic notion conceived in agreement with M. Alexis Léger. And M. Albert Lebrun, who had already put up with so many things and was to put up with so many more, fulfilled his allotted task. He signed the decree.

Next morning, May 19th, M. Léger reached the Ministry. Hardly had he entered when one of his secretaries came in and, his eyes moist with tears, handed him the official gazette.

Thus it was that M. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, learned of his downfall. I do not believe that there is such another

example of lack of consideration towards an official against whom no professional failing could be urged. But the trickery to which those behind the scenes had had to resort and the cowardice with which it was executed, since no one had had the pluck to take the responsibility on himself, were more remarkable than the personality of M. Léger, eminent though that is. The people really responsible had something more in their minds than the gratification of their vengeance and the satisfying of their interests and ambitions. They were deliberately opening the first breach in the Franco-British alliance, a breach which M. Baudouin would take it upon himself to widen when he had taken the place at the Foreign Office of M. Daladier, who was finally and savagely driven from the Government. The British Ambassador was under no misapprehension, nor was Mr. Winston Churchill, who discreetly inquired what M. Léger's departure meant. I doubt whether the amiable words freely showered upon them proved completely reassuring.

In the afternoon I went to the Foreign Office to express to Alexis Léger my feelings of friendship and indignation.

What I have just related did not come from him. What he confided to me of his explanation with M. Paul Reynaud is not my property, and, as I do not know where he is, it is impossible for me to ask his permission to make use of it. Interesting though it would be to make his remarks public, I am compelled to renounce the idea. All that I can say, for I am not alone in knowing it, is that M. Léger refused the post in Washington. He would not concede that Mr. Roosevelt could be approached by a man whose reputation had just been attacked by methods without parallel, and he insisted that his name should be transferred to the unattached list. "I have a right to the whole of the injustice," he declared to M. Daladier when he himself presented the necessary decree to the Minister for signature.

M. Reynaud, who had woken up to his blunder, and

friends of M. Léger endeavoured through Mr. Bullitt, United States Ambassador in Paris, to make M. Léger reconsider his refusal. They had their trouble for nothing. And he was right. In what kind of position would he, the man of Anglo-Franco-American policy, have found himself at Washington to explain the Bordeaux capitulation?

On May 20th I went to the Quai d'Orsay, where I met Signor Guariglia, the Italian Ambassador.

The representative of the country towards which it was asserted that the Secretary-General of the Foreign Office had been insufficiently conciliatory, told me of his regret at M. Léger's departure, and added: "I am very happy to have been able to become his friend, for the better you know him the more you like him. I'm just going to express my deepest sympathy."

An usher of the Ministry whispered in my ear: "*It's her* doing."

"Not *hers* alone," I answered.

Later, I took advantage of an interview with M. Paul Reynaud to find out his reaction to what had happened. Alexis Léger had left Paris without fuss, without making any statement, and had taken refuge in a retirement as full of dignity as his whole career.

Of my own accord I wanted to know if M. Paul Reynaud realised the loss that French diplomacy had sustained by his fault. I found no responsive chord and dropped the subject. All I did otherwise in the matter was to note that Berlin was very pleased over it all. Not without reason.

## Chapter XXIV

### General Weygand, Commander-in-Chief

GENERAL WEYGAND LEAVES SYRIA TO BECOME  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL  
PROCLAIMS HIS FAITH IN THE FRENCH GENIUS FOR  
RECOVERY—M. PAUL REYNAUD TELLS THE SENATE :  
“ THE COUNTRY IS IN DANGER ”—CONVERSATION WITH  
M. PAUL REYNAUD

DURING the afternoon of May 16th, let us remember, I had said to M. Paul Reynaud : “ Weygand ? ” And he had answered : “ Perhaps ! ”

Another person to whom I put the same question replied : “ Yes ! ”

Perhaps at the very moment of one of these questions of mine, a soldier whose name is bound up with that of the man who won the last war had received an urgent summons. He had been expecting it for a long time. Did he ask himself whether it did not come a little late ?

His destiny and his country commanded him. The engine of the aeroplane roared. General Weygand was in the cabin. The bird of steel and aluminium gained height and distance. A glance over his Syria. A thought for his army of the Middle East for which he had planned glorious activities. But a more pressing subject demanded his full attention. By cables and from the wireless he was vaguely aware that France was once more suffering an invasion. And it was he they sent for ! The purr of the engine lulled him. He closed his eyes. He dreamed. Had his hour struck, as twenty-two years before the hour



of the genius had struck whose inspirations he put into shape ?

In his mind's eye he saw Foch pacing his post of command with jerky steps, stopping before the immense maps displayed on the walls, putting his finger on a minute dot and describing a curve on the cloth with a wave of the hand. The little man spoke. He let fall bits of disjointed and disconnected sentences. Exclamations, little more than interjections. The leader's thoughts went too fast for their expression to be entangled in gradual transitions. He would pause exhausted, as though by the pangs of childbirth.

" You understand, Weygand ? "

Weygand had understood. Weygand translated Foch, bringing his schemes within the grasp of Haig, Pershing, Pétain, Debeney, Gouraud, Mangin, all of them. Foch was dead. Weygand knows well that he is not Foch. He will ask himself how Foch would have reacted. Foch will inspire him. And then, if he is not Foch, he is, perhaps, Turenne, the silent, the dauntless, the prudent. That Turenne whose campaigns he had retraced in a short book which is a model of comprehensiveness, clearness and precision.

Turenne, he said to himself, lacked the genius of the inspired, but he had the genius which is the outcome of long patience. The Germany of the early seventeenth century had felt its power. Why should he not be the Turenne of the twentieth century?

While the plane was flying rapidly towards Marignane airport, while responsibilities, plans, hopes and ambitions were vying with one another in Weygand's reflections, the rumour was passed from mouth to mouth in Paris, in the armies, through the whole of France: " Weygand is coming! He is Commander-in-Chief! " And such is the memory of Foch that it was as though Foch lived again! Many called to mind the break-through of 1918 which enabled Ludendorff's legions to advance as far as Château

Thierry, as far as Amiens, almost as far as Compiègne. And they remembered the famous order of the day : *Die where you stand !*

The official news was made known on the evening of Sunday, May 19th, at the same time as Mr. Winston Churchill made his first broadcast speech as Prime Minister. The speech dealt with the furious struggle where, on the soil of France and Belgium, the destinies of his country, of ours, and " of a whole group of dismembered States and slaughtered peoples " were at stake.

Amid the anxieties which kept the firmest hearts agasp the news and the speech appeared like luminous trails of confidence and hope in the murky sky.

Without " allowing himself the absurdity " of disguising the gravity of the events, Mr. Winston Churchill sent spurting from his inmost soul a veritable profession of faith in the *French genius* for recovery. He did not hide from his people that they, too, must expect a formidable onslaught even on their very island, for the battle of France would be followed by the battle of Britain, so aeroplanes, tanks, shells and guns were needed *even more rapidly than before*.

" Anyone who heard the speaker emphasise those last words," I wrote that same evening, " will have understood that the Empire's whole power of energy is concentrated in the will of Winston Churchill, the mouthpiece of all the history and traditions, of all the British qualities, associated with the history, traditions and qualities of France."

Why, alas ! are they not still officially associated ? But they are by some among us, by de Gaulle and his legions ; and they will be again.

General Weygand's arrival revived failing courage. If Weygand agreed to conduct military operations, that meant he did not despair. Indeed, as soon as he arrived, he conveyed an impression of coolness, lucidity and vitality, so much so that Mr. Winston Churchill, who had come

to Paris for a few hours, paid this tribute to the septuagenarian when he had a conversation with him: "I'm afraid you're a little too young."

It was on May 21st that Weygand plunged into the adventure. He flew over the Franco-Belgian front to discuss matters with the commanders of the armies under his orders, including the Belgian army and the B.E.F., producing everywhere an impression of calm and confident strength.

At the War Ministry this flight was considered as the prelude to a skilful manœuvre. There was much talk, too, of one general, General Billotte, who had spirit and a head very firmly screwed on. Alas!—another alas!—while going from one command post to another his car skidded. His chauffeur, who had a steel helmet on, was saved. He had not, and was killed. General Giraud had been sent for to save what was left of Corap's army. It was in the disorder of a rout that he fell. He was made prisoner. The bad luck of France continued.

The names Péronne, Arras and Amiens appeared in the communiqués.

The Senate assembled. A gust of anger blew along the lobbies of the Luxembourg, and M. Paul Reynaud went up into the rostrum to make a statement. Without preamble he pronounced the great sentence of the Great Revolution, which fell amid the Assembly like a bomb: "The Country is in danger!"

A murmur swelled into a roar. There were demands for the names of those to blame, of those responsible. But M. Paul Reynaud continued. He enumerated some of the terrible facts, he described how the total disaster of Corap's army had come about, how the hinge of the French army had snapped, how a gap a hundred kilometres wide had been opened through which the German motorised divisions had hurled themselves, sowing terror and causing panics. He disclosed that incredible errors—which would be punished—had been committed, notably the failure to

blow up the bridges over the Meuse. The curt, accusing sentences lashed the nerves of his hearers, and raised tension to the pitch of paroxysm. Gloomy silences followed shouts of indignation.

The atmosphere cleared only a trifle when he proclaimed his confidence "in the great Leader who has taken command of our armies," and "in the soldier of France who will be worthy of his ancestors." But M. Paul Reynaud has not the voice for words of faith: in his mouth they sound like nothing more than precautions.

Jeanneney, the Speaker of the Senate, went closer to the heart when in his worn voice he concluded with the words: "It is impossible that infamy can prevail." But the Assembly had been shaken by the great shudder of fear. It needed to revenge itself on one or several. Names were mentioned. It was said that Gamelin had committed suicide, that Corap was being court-martialled, and that fifteen generals would be relieved of their commands, and so on: a mixture of true and false, what did it matter? The situation was unprecedented.

People were ashamed next day of having been so much afraid, and harboured unjust resentment against Paul Reynaud for having lacked coolness. The Prime Minister was so much disconcerted by this, that during the night there was an attempt in his name to make the censorship forbid the newspapers to say that: "*The Country is in danger!*"

Altogether a curious phenomenon of successive spasms like the pulse of a sick man. But, putting aside these sudden leaps and bounds in M. Reynaud's temperature, what did General Weygand bring back from his visit to the armies?

"The situation can be restored," such was the gist of his remarks. "But it's serious, and will be all the more so because fighting spirit is not the same in all ranks of the army."

I have no intention of following the military events step

by step. Seeing the speed at which they unrolled, it is the broad outlines and the atmosphere which matter. During the twenty-first, twenty-second, and several days following, General Weygand, who had been summoned and who had come in order to be the saviour, believed in the possibility of saving. That was the impression I gleaned in the course of the talk I had with M. Paul Reynaud on May 25th.

"Weygand," he declared, "is reassuringly clear-headed. Marshal Pétain is ready for anything that may be asked of him. Yesterday we went together to see what the defences of Paris are like—just in case it should be necessary to defend Paris."

"And it will be defended?"

"Tooth and nail."

I reminded him discreetly that on May 16th some members of the Government had insinuated that Paris should be evacuated. He replied in brisk, ardent, staccato sentences: "It was the Generalissimo who had scared people. I ordered him to defend Paris at any price. We have gained the ascendancy again, and I assure you there's no longer any question of leaving Paris defenceless."

"The more so because if you went to Tours it would be scarcely less dangerous than Paris."

"Obviously. Unfortunately we haven't enough planes, enough material. Oh!" he exclaimed. "That——!" And, raising despairing arms, he pronounced the name of an official of the Ministry of War.

"Shall we manage to save the army of the North?"

He made an evasive gesture.

"We're doing our utmost. Forty-eight hours were lost when Gamelin was still in command. We ought not to have sent that army to Belgium. We believed that the Belgians would stand firm on the Albert Canal. The moment they gave ground the order for a general withdrawal ought to have been issued."

"Is it true that General Giraud is a prisoner?"

"Alas! Yes."

"Have you superseded many people?"

"Yes. And it's not finished yet. We shall turn a good many intelligent and determined colonels into generals."

"From information that I've had, may I put you on your guard against a peace offensive tending to separate us from England?"

"I guarantee that we shall withstand it."

"Are you afraid that Italy will come into the war very shortly?"

"They speak of June 10th."

He made a movement of the hands as though to say:  
"We must trust in God!"

What a strange being he is! "What is he really like?" I said to myself after taking my leave of Paul Reynaud and recalling his clear, ardent words. He would defend Paris. He would withstand the peace offensive against England. So he was still the man who had said to me, as to others: "I will win the war! I will win the war!"

And I sought to drive from my mind the doubts planted in it by so many of his actions, braggings, impulses, and injustices. And I said to myself as others, too, were saying: "Weygand! Perhaps he is another Foch?"

## Chapter XXV

### The Conspiracy Begins—Capitulation of the King of the Belgians

A MINISTER DENOUNCES M. BAUDOUIN'S DEFEATISM  
TO M. PAUL REYNAUD—AN UNDERGROUND CAMPAIGN  
TO REGENERATE FRANCE THROUGH DEFEAT—CAPITULA-  
TION OF THE KING OF THE BELGIANS—GENERAL  
WEYGAND BEGINS TO WEAKEN—MASTERY OF M.  
GEORGES MANDEL

BETWEEN May 25th, when I culled from M. Reynaud's lips words which warmed my heart, and the twenty-eighth, the date of the Belgian capitulation, is only three days. But in those three days the whole fire which Mr. Winston Churchill imagined burned in General Weygand was put out. The Commander-in-Chief saw that he could not hope to claim the glory of an immediate recovery. He was ready to let his hands fall idly in his lap. Foch the indomitable did not live again in Weygand, and Weygand had not the backbone of Turenne.

Was he influenced by the atmosphere of the War Ministry, where about the Premier there were almost none save adherents of a rapid peace? It is possible, but that does not amount to an adequate explanation. A Minister who was at that time a member of the Government, and remained so until the beginning of September, when he was evicted by Laval, disclosed to M. Paul Reynaud his fears regarding the atmosphere which reigned in the Rue St. Dominique, and even in the rooms adjoining the Premier's Cabinet room. He pointed out M. Paul Baudouin

to him as the principal forerunner of the pacifist enterprise whose beginning he could clearly see.

M. Reynaud replied that that was, perhaps, true when M. Baudouin was at the Foreign Office, but that his associate had now become the most uncompromising supporter of war to the end. The other insisted. M. Reynaud refused to believe a word of it, and when he was urged to listen to notes of overheard conversations exchanged with the outside by members of his own departmental staff, he smiled and laughed about it without misgiving.

A friend to whom the Minister imparted his worries gave him this advice: "You're wrong to complain of Baudouin's intrigues direct to Reynaud. Since you're on good terms with General Weygand, warn him, and his intervention will carry more weight with the Prime Minister than yours."

Was this step taken? I never heard of it. But already the general had ceased to have any hope of conquering, and at this moment a campaign was at its height, of which I had certainty and proof later, but whose existence was revealed to me then only by indications, which, for all that, were extremely valuable.

My attention was drawn to secret meetings, conferences between two or three conspirators, visits made to one another by the apostles of a new mysticism: their object was to win over as many people as possible to the necessity of defeat. Defeat? Yes. Defeat! The thesis was developed that France must be regenerated by expiation, that defeat nobly accepted would allow the overthrow of an evil régime whose existence victory would perpetuate. They did not blame the vices of the régime in order to reform it. It had to be destroyed, and in order to destroy it capitulation was necessary. By asking for an armistice at once, good peace terms would be obtained. Thanks to Mussolini, Hitler would be magnanimous, well content to have a few ports at his disposal against England, with whom they would break off alliance. In writing this I



am putting forward nothing of which I am not certain I say that persons of importance—and I know the name of one to whom Marshal Pétain's Government recently assigned a prominent position—made to several people confidential remarks which I can sum up as follows :

*France is in need of defeat. Defeat is necessary for her regeneration. Victory would strengthen the political régime which has led to her moral ruin. Anything is preferable to the continuation of so perfidious a régime. Defeat followed by a rapid peace will perhaps cost us a province, a few ports, some colonies. What is that in comparison with her regeneration, which is indispensable ?*

One of the people the group wished to convince, because her *salon* was the meeting-place of a number of distinguished men and women who might be useful propagandists, was indignant at the monstrosity of the plan. So they invoked the authority of the men who were the apostles of this impious doctrine. They told her that the inspirer, thinker, and future statesman was none other than Baudouin, whose ardent neo-Catholicism she well knew. She had but very limited confidence in Baudouin, and pursed her lips.

"There's Weygand, too," they added.

She started. "Weygand? The Commander-in-Chief! In favour of defeat?"

"He no longer believes victory possible. He is practically won over to our side."

"And Pétain?" she gasped.

"Oh, we shall convince him, make him see that France, whose birth-rate is already low, cannot risk the loss, as in 1914-18, of another fifteen hundred thousand dead, and perhaps more!"

The man who spoke thus knew how to wield his arguments. However, though he tried for two hours, he did not get the better of the person to whom he was laying siege. He was disappointed, and the resistance he had encountered aroused his fears. So, when he gave up the attempt, he begged her to keep the secret.

## The Conspiracy Begins

311

There are secrets too heavy to be kept. This one was not kept wholly inviolate. She freed herself of the burden of it. The person who received it did not, perhaps, attach enough importance to it. When it reached me it was too late. The poison enclosed in its shell had already done the greater part of its work.

M. Paul Reynaud, I believe, never knew anything of this conspiracy, of which he was to be the victim concurrently with the nation.

At the same time as the venom was trickling into French veins the military tragedy was developing. The defences of Boulogne and Calais were overrun by the German motorised divisions. The pincers, which Brauchitsch aimed at closing round the armies sent to Belgium and round the Belgian army itself, were drawing tighter, whilst the French and British generals engaged in the struggle were desperately striving to break one of its claws.

But among all the misfortunes of which France was the victim, there was lacking one which ought to have been spared her.

I thought then that the summit of horror had been reached. I was mistaken. I could not yet imagine Bordeaux!

The shock was not the less appallingly painful for coming from the son of Albert I, the king without fear and without reproach.

Just when a gigantic battle was in progress, in which the fortune of arms seemed to be turning away from France and a maximum of intrepidity was needed to swing advantage to our side, what happened?

"*The Belgian Army*"—I quote the accusing terms in which M. Paul Reynaud, broadcasting on the morning of May 28th, trounced the King of the Belgians—"the Belgian army has just capitulated unconditionally, in the thick of the fight and on the order of its king, without warning its French and British comrades-in-arms and opening to the German troops the road to Dunkirk. That," declared M. Paul Reynaud, "is an action without precedent in history."

Strict justice compels me to say that Belgian voices have raised themselves to clear King Leopold III of the charge of treachery laid upon him in M. Paul Reynaud's speech. M. Gutt, the Belgian Minister of Finance, who, until the arrival in London of M. Pierlot and M. Spaak, detained in Spain with M. de Vleeschauwer, represented the Belgian Government in Great Britain, publicly stated that Leopold III had not come to terms with the enemy, and remained a prisoner. M. Gutt—and when one knows his moral and intellectual worth, his evidence carries weight—has declared that the capitulation of the Belgian army was inevitable. He wrote: "The total collapse of the French armies in the south, coupled with the orders of the French Generalissimo preventing the Belgian troops from retreating at a time they could have done it, brought about the encirclement of the Belgian army and made the surrender unavoidable."

Such a testimony, emanating from one who, amid the greatest difficulties, resolved to maintain the strength of the Government of Free Belgium and succeeded in doing so, cannot be neglected. I have made a point of setting it forth. History will say later how far the Belgian capitulation, which was an obvious moral disaster, complicated the saving both of the B.E.F. and of the French northern armies.

During the night of May 27th–28th, a Council of Ministers was held at the Elysée. Weygand was called on to forecast the course of events. It was asserted that he said: "*The Germans will get through where and when they like.*" It was not at this Council meeting that he made this statement, but in private conversation. At this Council meeting of May 27th–28th he exonerated himself from all responsibility, insisting on the disastrous condition of the army at the date when it was entrusted to his orders. As early as this he expressed certain apprehensions about the social consequences which might result from a rout of the regiments and displayed his passion for authority, which, for that matter, it was well known that he possessed.

In him the strategist and the tactician began to give way to the partisan with a fear of Bolshevism. From then on his chief thought was to keep ready to his hand an army of social defence against an imaginary revolution. No longer would he command victory.

There was one man, M. Mandel, who, amid the turmoil and at grips with the worst difficulties, preserved a marvellous self-control. At the Ministry of the Interior, where he spent his days and nights, M. Mandel had ascertained as soon as he arrived on May 19th that things there were even worse than he had described in his most cutting criticisms. People were astonished that he gave orders. They were even more surprised to have to obey. They were dismayed, having failed in their duty, to find themselves suspended or dismissed. On the other hand, I heard a high official say: "It's a pleasure to work with him; one can see where one's going."

He was alarmingly clear-headed and foresaw the worst, but his self-possession was never disturbed by it. On the contrary, one might say that danger stimulated him and that he took pride in defying disaster while neglecting nothing for his part in order to ward it off.

He never had any illusions about General Gamelin. "A very intelligent prefect," he would say, "and a Generalissimo for large-scale manœuvres." He knew that Weygand was only Foch's secretary, and not even the half of Foch, but this secretary might, perhaps, have had flashes of imagination and some grip. When the General collapsed, Mandel perceived it, and would never draw back while it was still possible to face up to him.

He had helped Paul Reynaud as best he could. He continued to help him and that without any ulterior motive; but he could not endow him with political sense, knowledge of men and fixity of thought, all qualities which the Premier would never have. He could not, above all, spend his life in fighting against the tendencies of a set which became more and more noxious. He had deplored

the spirit of distrust in Daladier which had worked against his other real and powerful qualities, but he was not among those who, having extolled him to the skies, now pointed him out as a scapegoat.

As for Mandel, who had seen the approach of the war from afar, he knew, and was not afraid to say that the responsibility went much farther back in the past, and embraced a large number of bodies and individuals. Over the President of the Republic he had the authority that a man who has a will can have over one who has never known what will consisted of. M. Albert Lebrun was dumb-founded by the march of events, and asked: "How? Why?"

"But that goes far back, very far back, sir," Mandel replied.

"How is that?"

"Because when you reviewed the troops each year, where did you do it? At Betheny? At Longchamp? Not a bit of it! In the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. And the great manœuvres? They had become wretched little exercises, something like one of those Nuremburg toys. Little by little all real discipline was allowed to disappear from the army. They wanted to make war with officer-functionaries and citizens. But war is made with commanders and soldiers, and now we're paying for it. The situation will be made good if France shows sufficient determination."

The same Mandel who spoke thus boldly to the President of the Republic said to me and to many others:

*"Shall we fight in Paris? I don't know, it's a matter the Government will have to decide. But behind Paris we shall certainly have to. I said one day, and was laughed at, that perhaps we should be reduced to fighting on the Adour, or even at Timbuctoo. That was a manner of speaking, I admit, but that manner says what it means."*

*"Assume that we are reduced to the plight of having no more than one little corner of France that we can keep. Should we confess ourselves beaten and negotiate with the Germans? Suppose the British didn't?"*

*"If the British don't negotiate and are beaten, obviously we shall be beaten too. But can you possibly conceive of them opening negotiations for peace? Do you know the prodigies they are performing at this moment at Dunkirk to save what can be saved of the armies of the North? They won't capitulate, not they. Then, if they conquer and we have deserted them, we shall be in the worst of messes, with dishonour thrown in as well. There's no question of it."*

"I hope the people at the head of things think the same way as you do."

He tossed his head back, crossing his hands behind it and, after waiting a few seconds, slowly uttered these words: "My dear friend, when he who governs knows what he wants he can always impose his will on others. It is sufficient to will the thing."

"And if the worst happened? Then Tours? Bordeaux?"

"Tours first, as a stage on the way."

"And afterwards—Bordeaux?"

"Not Bordeaux. Anything but that. Brittany ought to be the last French stronghold, with Brest as the capital. The port would assure communications with America, England and the French Empire; for do not forget that there is a French Empire and that I was Minister for the Colonies."

Of this conversation, one of many which we had, I reproduce certain portions without fear of compromising him, for I know he is not one of those who repudiate their words. I brought it to a close with this statement: "My dear Minister, I shall have confidence as long as you are in the position you occupy now, or in a higher one."

It was on May 30th that we exchanged these remarks, seventeen days before that dishonour which we brushed aside in our conversation, the very day on which the British Navy and Air Force, covering themselves with glory, began the evacuation which was to last until June 4th, and which will remain in the memory of men as one of the finest and most heroic military and moral operations of all time.

## Chapter XXVI

### M. Reynaud Expels M. Daladier from his Government

LAST NEGOTIATIONS WITH ITALY—CONVERSATION WITH M. PIERRE LAVAL—AN AIR SQUADRON BOMBS PARIS—M. HENRY BÉRENGER SEES M. PAUL REYNAUD—DRAMATIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS—STATEMENT BY M. DALADIER—I SAY GOOD-BYE TO M. DALADIER—MINISTERIAL RESHUFFLE—THE KING'S HOUSEHOLD

ON May 19th M. Daladier had left the War Ministry for the Foreign Office. On his arrival at the Quai d'Orsay he suffered the humiliation of being deprived of M. Alexis Léger and of being presented with M. Charles Roux instead. The compensation was meagre. However, according to the instructions of M. Paul Reynaud, Mme. de Portes, and M. Baudouin this transfer was only a half-way stage.

The operation had been planned in two steps. They were anxious to proceed to the second as soon as possible. Hélène de Portes and Paul Baudouin brought unflagging tenacity to the task. Hélène de Portes, who had appropriated the active rôle of Premier's wife, lost no opportunity of exciting Paul Reynaud's *amour propre*.

"What are you waiting for? I suppose you're going to let him form a cabal against you from his lair in the Quai d'Orsay which will overthrow you."

"You know I shan't allow anything of the sort. But I must have a valid reason for acting."

They would find him one!

M. Daladier, suspecting nothing, was grappling with the insoluble problem of Italy. At a recent Council of Ministers

General Weygand, when questioned, had stated that if Italy came into the war he would have practically nothing to put against her in the Alps. A majority of the members had definitely suggested that offers should be made to what Jules Cambon used to call "our ungrateful and jealous neighbour." They had mentioned Djibouti, French Somaliland, Southern Tunisia. M. de Monzie had interrupted the enumeration with the contemptuous remark: "That's mere chicken-feed!"

M. Paul Reynaud had gone to London to ask Churchill whether Great Britain would not consent to add to the chicken-feed some mess of pottage or other.

Mr. Churchill had refused. He refused just as energetically on May 31st at the meeting of the Supreme War Council in Paris at which, however, the evacuation of Narvik was decided upon. This would only be made public later, after the complete re-embarkation of the troops, most of whom were French. Mr. Churchill considered that, conditions being what they were at the moment, any negotiations with Italy would be doomed to failure and would only be regarded as a sign of weakness. Mussolini would put the proposals on record and class them as gains acquired for *later on*.

Nevertheless, a note was handed to the Italian Ambassador. But it was trouble taken for nothing.

According to even the least questionable information, Mussolini's decision was already taken. Non-belligerence was coming to an end.

This was not the opinion of Pierre Laval whom I met one evening at a restaurant in the Place de la Madeleine, and who came to join us when his meal was over. He was in despair about the possibility of Italy coming into the war.

"There's nothing more to be done to prevent it," I said to him.

"But at first it would be chiefly against England that Mussolini would direct his attacks," he argued.



## 318 Truth on the Tragedy of France

"Do you think so? He has more to ask from us than from Great Britain."

"No! They want Malta, Gibraltar, Suez and Egypt. After that they'll turn their attention to us. I allowed some Italian journalists to talk freely, and they told me that."

"What do they know about it?"

We dropped the subject of Italy. The talk continued fitfully. I note it down chiefly as a document, for it was the last conversation that we had together. Soon after it I should leave France and he would mount the pinnacle to become *legally* something like the Dauphin of the King of France, but *actually Mayor of the Palace*.

"Is it true that Pierre Cot is going as Ambassador to Russia?" he asked.

"The idea's been given up. But really you're the person Reynaud ought to ask to go to Moscow. You're the only one who knows Stalin."

M. Pierre Laval laughed derisively.

"My word! We got on very well together. We understand each other thoroughly."

"Have you seen Daladier?"

"Yes. He said nothing to me."

"No one goes to see him now. The wheel has turned. Humanity's pretty contemptible."

"Yes. The people who cheered him are now talking of shooting him!"

"How about Reynaud? What's his position as regards the Senate?"

"Not much better than Daladier's."

He questioned me about the panic that spread through the Government on May 16th.

"Were they all over the place?"

"Except for one."

"Who was that?"

"Mandel was the only man to keep his balance."

"I'm not surprised. I saw him in the last war. He's

not afraid. I believe he even likes the risk, takes real pleasure in it. They say the same thing of Monzie."

"I dare say. I didn't know."

"And Léger?"

I described briefly how he had been treated.

"Things are moving faster, I can see!" said Laval, with a harsh laugh.

"When he took leave of Lebrun——"

Laval will never know what I was going to tell him, for he broke in with: "I'd like to go and see that fellow just to tell him a thing or two."

"What do they think about it in the provinces?"

"They say nothing. They won't talk until they know the names of the dead. But there's one feeling which is dominant: fear. Yes, fear! And they're right. If he wins——?"

"Who? Hitler?"

"Yes. He won't spare us."

"I'm sure of that."

He didn't spare the Parisians, to begin with, a few days later. On June 3rd he sent over about a hundred airmen who bombed the Citröen works, some houses in the neighbourhood, and the area round the Air Ministry. Mr. Bullitt, the United States Ambassador, who was lunching with M. Eynac, the Air Minister, had the real baptism of bombing. One fell a few yards from them without exploding.

Writing these lines more than three months after the event, while Goering's bombers are savagely attacking London, I smile. The little firework display in Paris on June 3rd gave me only a remote idea of what, in common with the brave folk of London, I hear every night. I am convinced, I may add, that the Parisians would have equalled the Londoners in coolness and courage if they had been honoured with such violent and repeated attentions from Hitler. I am tempted to regret that they were not. If they had been, perhaps politicians would have been compelled to make way for men.

The day after 335,000 officers and men of the armies of the North had been evacuated from Dunkirk by the British Navy, assisted by the French, this aerial visit came to herald a fresh onslaught by the German motorised divisions on the Somme and on the Aisne.

While awaiting the issue of it, which, unhappily, would not be uncertain, M. Paul Reynaud meditated a further reshuffle of his Ministry. He had taken a liking for such action. This would be the third time in less than three months. His principal object would be the final elimination of M. Daladier from the Government.

This was the second step in the operation of May 18th. M. Paul Baudouin and Mme. de Portes made up his mind for him by providing him with the best of pretexts. They had recourse to the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate, where they had reliable agents, and the President of it, M. Henry Bérenger, who had a touch of sadism in his mind as well as in his glance, would steer the manoeuvre with calm voracity.

The Commission met and decided to have no relations with the new Minister for Foreign Affairs. It charged its President to acquaint the Prime Minister with its decision. M. Henry Bérenger performed his mission with the air of a man who is going to savour a rare pleasure. He licked his lips as with an innocent air he declared to M. Paul Reynaud that the honour of the Commission could not be tarnished by the least contact with M. Daladier. He was sorry to add another worry to the many which already beset the Premier. It cost him much to execute this mission of justice, but patriotism had rights that there was no gainsaying.

As he spoke in a sorrowful tone his accusing eye was riveted on M. Paul Reynaud, who feigned surprise. M. Bérenger was delighted to see him conceal his feelings so badly and to hear him murmur a few words of astonishment. Pretending to be greatly affected and very much put out, M. Paul Reynaud remarked that this was a

complication with which he would gladly have dispensed. But he understood the feeling that had dictated the Commission's decision. He barely restrained himself from saying that he approved it. Let the Commission rely on him. It would receive satisfaction.

Sanctimoniously M. Henry Bérenger thanked him in the name of the Commission. The Commission expected no less from the Premier's patriotism. The bent figure bowed itself out, casting a last glance at M. Paul Reynaud, who was impatient for his visitor to be gone so that he could give free expression to his delight. He had got his revenge! Was it on this day that, pointing to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was going out of his office, he said in the presence of several colleagues: "I've got him! We've got him!"

The exact concordance of dates is less important than the accuracy of the thought and expression.

As he crossed the ante-room and went down the staircase, walking with his usual slowness and casting suspicious glances about him as though he feared that someone might detect the intoxication which held him exultant, M. Henry Bérenger murmured as he thought of M. Paul Reynaud: "What a wretched actor!" Then his thoughts roved to M. Daladier: a spiteful gleam, which he usually controlled, flickered in his eyes. He had just served M. Paul Reynaud's vengeance, but he had also served his own. This Daladier, who had never shown him the least deference, or even the least attention, who greeted him with disdainful irony when he said: "The President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate," this Daladier, who had had all the luck—power, popularity, everything—he hated him, and it was he, Henry Bérenger, who was going to sever his hamstrings!

Why could he not be behind an unsilvered mirror on the day when Paul Reynaud handed to Daladier the text of the Commission's resolution, so as to see the faces and hear the dialogue! What a Nero's pleasure that would be!

It was no longer possible for M. Paul Reynaud to draw back; nor did he want to. He had an excellent pretext. What was the use of waiting? The sooner the better. But the Prime Minister wanted to kill several birds with one stone. After having extorted Daladier's resignation, he intended to get rid of a certain number of the ministers in office and replace them by people who were stronger or more ardently attached to the Reynaud-de Portes-Baudouin combine.

On June 5th he devoted his day to the delicate problem of making a ministerial list. Later it was known that many lists were made, remade, torn up, and then restored again.

By whom should he replace Daladier? It was certain that M. Baudouin would be the one to go to the Quai d'Orsay, because that was what Mme. de Portes wished. It was, moreover, the logical sequel to the expulsion of M. Alexis Léger, and his presence in this position was one of the necessities of the conspiracy which for days had clearly been taking shape.

M. Paul Reynaud who, as though with a kind of perversity, always mingled the best and the worst, had an idea of appointing as War Minister Colonel de Gaulle, whom he had just promoted to the rank of general, and who had been his inspirer in his campaign for the motorisation of the army.

But M. Paul Reynaud came up against a formal offensive on the part of Hélène de Portes. She knew this de Gaulle. He was not the kind of man to be led by the ears. She would not have him in the hollow of her hand. He could stand up for himself. He was not afraid to speak his mind. Reynaud listened to him and admired him. With de Gaulle on the spot she was afraid she would not be all powerful in every respect. Moreover, he did not conceal his contempt for funks. He would not allow himself to be overruled, either by Weygand or Pétain. He had worked with them. He knew them and he knew their limitations.

She laid a direct veto on de Gaulle. She did not quite

say : " Me or de Gaulle ! " but very nearly. The whole evening and for part of the night, Paul Reynaud stood firm. Eventually they struck a bargain. General de Gaulle would not be a Minister but a plain Under-Secretary of State at the War Office. The first note the young general would have to deal with would be one from her which she handed to him on his arrival in the presence of Paul Reynaud himself. In it, having declared an interdict on the return of Paul Reynaud's collaborator, M. Palewski, whom she boasted that she had sent back to the army three months before, she emphasised the dangers that the new Under-Secretary would run in not avoiding her ill-will.

The other choices and dismissals were no great source of conflict. M. Lamoureux was sacrificed. At a previous Council meeting, when the subject of discussion was the possibility of negotiations with Italy, he had exclaimed : " That might be the prelude to a conversation with Germany ! " This exclamation had brought protests even from those who were of the same opinion as he. But the reason for his departure was less this untimely remark than the wish to entrust the Ministry of Finance to M. Bouthillier, who was hand-in-glove with them. M. Frossard would vanish from the Ministry of Information, where he had been no more than a fleeting and lustreless meteor, in order to make room for one of the magnates of the French press, whose astounding success deceived the stupidity of certain *salons* and cliques to the extent of earning him in those quarters a reputation for genius. They would learn in time that he was only a soap bubble. M. Prouvost would show that it is easier to kneel before Hitler than to be a great Minister.

In memory of the services rendered by M. Frossard in hastening the fall of Daladier's Cabinet, M. Reynaud rescued him from the shelf and put him down at the Ministry of Public Works, whence M. de Monzie was sent tumbling without explanation. He was no longer needed to cajole Italy. M. Baudouin was there.

But the hours were passing. M. Reynaud had not yet had the indispensable preliminary explanation with M. Daladier. Hurriedly he sent for him, summoning a Council of Ministers at the same time. What happened at this interview? M. Daladier was not expecting it. I can guarantee that because, by a coincidence which had certainly not been agreed upon with M. Reynaud, we had lunched privately together.

In view of the dislike of the two men for each other, the interview must have been bleakly and in a subdued way dramatic. But it could not attain the tragic level reached at the meeting of the Council of Ministers held an hour or so after. Three Cabinet Ministers gave me a circumstantial description of it. Such differences as there were between the three accounts were only trifling, and all the essentials I was able to verify the next morning from the lips of M. Daladier himself.

It was fairly late, after dinner, when the Council meeting began. There were no preliminaries. Curtly M. Reynaud announced that he found himself compelled to make changes in his Cabinet. He apologised to his colleagues for the necessity, but added with emphasis: "It is war-time, and peace-time precautions have no place in these days."

Each man was getting ready to sign the collective form of resignation which enables Heads of the Government to keep some Ministers and drop others without having to appear before Parliament, when M. Daladier asked leave to speak.

It was immediately realised that tragedy was in the air. Silence fell. Every glance was focused on M. Daladier, who, keeping himself well under control in order to master his emotion, began as follows:

"Gentlemen, it is my duty to give you an explanation. The Prime Minister sent for me this evening at eight-thirty, and informed me of the step taken in the name of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate by its

worthy President, M. Henry Bérenger. Neither the worthy M. Bérenger nor the Commission will agree to have any contact with the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I might raise a protest against this method of procedure. If the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate had anything with which to reproach me, it had only to summon me to appear before it. I should have complied and, having questioned and listened to me, it could have adopted whatever resolution it thought fit, and from that I should have understood the decision it was proper for me to take. The nature of the present communication, however, does not surprise me, coming from the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate.

"But I have something to say about the military situation.

"There is a tendency to want to make me to blame, to hold me responsible for events. So I am anxious to point out that when I came to the War Ministry in 1936 there were in the way of modern machines, tanks, planes, etc., etc., no more than one and a half per cent. of the full strength desired. Even so, when I left the Ministry there were three thousand tanks and thousands of planes, without counting those we are expecting from America. And it is not my fault that more were not ordered. The Finance Minister of that time raised objections which I was unwilling to override: the fault was mine.

"I am conscious of having worked to the best of my ability for the good of my country. I was under no illusions about the dangers which an offensive might create, and I can say that if I adopted a policy of patience, it was not without reason. If I was not anxious for the water to be troubled it was because my aim was to gain time, to gain as much time as possible.

"That said, Gentlemen, my conscience is my own affair. This evening, before coming here, I was with my two sons. In their company I found the comfort and consolation which enable me to face any who might be tempted



to attack me. The rest matters little. Gentlemen, I resign from the Government."

The Ministers had listened to M. Daladier in complete silence. Some, those who felt a liking for this upright, honest man, whose will alone had been less purposeful than his intentions, or those again who, though their attitude towards him was of indifference, had a feeling for great, personal tragedies, were breathless with emotion. There were some who had tears in their eyes when they heard M. Daladier speak of his sons; whilst others, the declared or secret enemies sneered, and gloated over the pale face and dulled voice of this rival so suddenly cast down. Their hard hearts rejoiced in the stroke of luck which had allowed them to witness a great sight—the downfall of a man.

M. Paul Reynaud presented an even more curious object of observation for a psychologist. During M. Daladier's explanation he pretended at first not to look at him, then he began to take evident pleasure in seeing him on the defensive. The sentimental reference to his children appeared to exasperate him. "What are children doing in this business?" Such was the question his Aztec-like countenance, puckered in astonishment, seemed to ask. Finally, he came to the conclusion that the explanation was lasting too long. He was in a hurry to erect the tombstone over the corpse of his enemy. Hardly had M. Daladier finished than M. Reynaud remarked in a confident tone: "No one questions either the patriotism or the intentions of M. Daladier."

And that was all.

The next day, as early as possible, I went to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. I was anxious to give evidence of my personal friendship to this man who was worthy of a better end and who, in the dignity of his downfall, was superior to those who overwhelmed him—as their behaviour would not fail to prove.

He had not yet arrived, so I waited for him. As soon

as he saw me when he came in, his own face lit up as though he was glad to see a friend's. He looked rested. He spoke to me in simple words :

"It wasn't a very pleasant moment. But I found consolation in the company of my children. I hadn't managed to sleep for days and nights. But last night I was able to relax. I was set free, and I slept. You see, it's better like that. If only we win the war, that's what matters. Afterwards, we shall see."

I asked him how it had all come about. He told me, and rounded his thoughts off by repeating what he had often declared to me before :

"You know, it wasn't without good reason that I played in the military sphere a purely waiting game. I allowed *them* to imagine that one day or other *they* might be able to come to some arrangement with me. The emissaries sent ambassadors through various interpreters. I said neither yes nor no, because it was only semi-official. I did nothing to lead them on, but I thought it was a good work to leave their illusions undisturbed."

"Why ?"

"Because, all the while they did not launch an offensive against us on a grand scale, time was passing. And, as I've often had occasion to tell you, we might perhaps win the winter, that is to say, amass a stock of tanks and planes, not only through our own resources but by huge purchases made in America.

"I considered that Reynaud's coming into power would cause the scales to fall from the enemies' eyes. I told the President so. I ought not to have joined Reynaud's Cabinet. Only I was tired. I had had that riding accident. I'd suffered a lot of pain. I went to the secret session after two or three sleepless nights. My nerves were frayed. I had years of work and responsibility behind me. All that told on me. I made foolish mistakes. But the essential thing is to win the war. But I'm afraid victory's endangered. Reynaud is intelligent, brilliant,

but he is badly balanced, and the people round him are appalling."

"You mean Baudouin?—Hélène de Portes?"

"Yes. They're public misfortunes. But let's not talk about all that now, d'you mind?"

After I left him—not without emotion on either side, and, as it happened, I was not to see him again—I said to myself: "What a pity. This man of shrewdness and sound patriotic sense has never been guilty in intention. This man, who has something of the great man in him, has been guilty of nothing worse than indecision. God is my witness that I did not encourage him in that. By the force of his nature and habit he was led to apply methods of slowness, waiting and watchfulness which turned out to be unequal to the exceptional situation which he was called upon to face, and powerless in particular against delays which ought to have been made good with heroic ruthlessness. What a pity!"

In passing, I note that during the afternoon of June 5th M. Laval had had that barbed conversation with the President of the Republic which he had announced in advance to me. But I must go back.

After the meeting of the Council, M. Paul Reynaud returned to his ministerial lists. The birth of the new Cabinet was not easy. M. Pomaret was very nearly left high and dry, but was rescued by the fair sex. M. Sarraut learned of his dismissal from the next morning's papers. M. Dautry was on the black list, and then the difficulty of finding anyone competent for the Ministry of Armaments saved him from the shipwreck to which he had been condemned. Piétri nearly got in. He spent part of the night outside the Elysée, and the Ministry of the Interior, on the look out for news. Then, during the night, he telephoned to a Corsican friend, and the latter rang up M. Ybarnegaray with the request that he should ask M. Paul Reynaud to grant M. Piétri the succession to the office of M. Lamoureux. Poor Piétri! In all these

successive crises he was not able to find employment for his faculties. He would only find it later in one of the Pétain-Laval Cabinets, but his passage through it would be so ephemeral that he would barely have time to do more than receive the stigma attaching to it. He is now French Ambassador in Madrid, has an official job, and is content.

But one man, while remaining outwardly unmoved, was feeling a joy that nothing could disturb. He was fulfilling the first of his dreams—I say the first, because he aimed still higher. This man was M. Paul Baudouin.

As for M. Reynaud, according to his custom, he proclaimed next morning with much beating of the big drum that he had at last the kind of War Cabinet for which he craved, that is, supposing the words to have any meaning, a Cabinet composed of men who, whatever happened, would carry on the war “to the end,” whether that should be on the Loire, the banks of the Adour, Brest, Algiers, Casablanca, Timbuctoo, or *somewhere* in the immense French Empire, if that were necessary! Now, this was the Cabinet which, ten days later, would vote by a majority of three or four votes—the exact figure is a matter of dispute—in favour of asking for an armistice.

Three or four votes—Messrs. Baudouin, Prouvost, Frossard and Pomaret would be those four.

Towards evening on June 5th M. Mandel and M. Langeron had given orders for the arrest of a certain number of well-known defeatists.

M. Reynaud, for his part, was putting or keeping others in the Government.

“This Ministry!” observed an unkind reader, when the list appeared next morning, “this Ministry is *the Royal Household*.”

## Chapter XXVII

### The Stab in the Back

GENERAL WEYGAND WEAKENS—M. PAUL REYNAUD'S EXCITABLE CONDITION—ITALY DECLARES WAR—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S MESSAGE—MR. ROOSEVELT DISCLOSES IN A SPEECH HIS NOBLE EFFORTS TO STOP MUSSOLINI SHORT ON THE BRINK OF WAR—A BRIEF SPEECH BY M. PAUL REYNAUD—THE GOVERNMENT LEAVES PARIS FOR TOURS

THIS is not a military history that I am writing. I may therefore be excused for not even mentioning the military operations which moved from the Meuse to the Somme and the Aisne and then to the Oise and the Seine. May the heroes of isolated and individual acts of gallantry forgive me for allowing them to be lost in a rout, which the Commander-in-Chief could no longer hold in check save in orders of the day and in communiqués.

Certainly it is true that France may be proud of the leaders and soldiers of the heroic army of the North; it is indeed true also that, as my colleague Louis Levy, who witnessed it, declared to me, a man like General Delattre proved on the Aisne that where there were leaders the soldiers of France stopped the horde of iron and steel. Certainly General de Gaulle, a bare few days before being appointed by M. Paul Reynaud to the post of Under-Secretary of State at the War Office, proved that the tactician, at the head of his brigade, was the equal of the military theorist. There was still a Maginot Line, intact, the defenders of which fearlessly awaited an enemy who would disdain them. There was still the army of

Huntziger which was winning counter-attacks and preserving the hinge of Montmédy.

From that point to the sea there were units which fought, but they were almost on their own. The others retreated and retreated, towns were taken by a dozen German motor-cyclists. But there was no longer a Commander-in-Chief who had in his mind what General Debeney wrote, namely: "*We must hold out, hold out; that is, gain the necessary delay until the material comes which will ensure victory.*" Everything in what took place makes one think that they had ceased to fear disaster, but were allowing it to come upon them.

Every day General Weygand and Marshal Pétain had long conversations with M. Paul Reynaud. Once, often twice, daily, as General de Gaulle, who was a witness of it, told me later, General Weygand brought long reports which were so many bulletins of defeat, and whose conclusion, though not yet specifically indicated, became a little more probable every day—*armistice*. The word was not mentioned yet, but it was heralded by calculated allusions.

The men who had been in a position to meet General Weygand between May 19th and May 25th, and who saw him again in Paris between June 6th and June 11th, no longer recognised him as the same man. They had admired his lucidity and coolness. They could now see only the fatigue of nervous exhaustion, ill-temper, and sometimes, when subordinates were concerned, a tone which was very far from courteous. Nothing could be more revealing.

The questions which came up in the little Governmental meetings were to do with the defence of Paris and the departure of the Government.

M. Paul Reynaud had said to me: "We will fight before Paris, in Paris, behind Paris!"

It was now a matter of deciding whether to fight in Paris or whether Paris should be declared an open town.

There were two opposed points of view. The first was that of the revolutionary tradition, of desperate battle quarter by quarter, if need be, street by street, leaving the enemy to bear the opprobrium of destroying treasures of stone amassed by the centuries. Paris delivered over to fire and sword would rouse the dulled soul of the country and set free in the world, and particularly in America, a current of love and help in favour of France.

The other was that of the High Command, the politicians, and the keepers and curators of old buildings. Their contention was that it is not cities which fight, but armies. A city can be occupied and the army remain intact to defend other parts of the national territory.

As to the effect on the country and on foreign opinion, their own interested motives compelled them to deny it, and only to recognise the enormous damage which property and public buildings would suffer.

Had the first theory prevailed, the Government, if not as a whole, at least in part, ought to have stayed in Paris like the British Government, which is deliberating, as I write, with the bombs falling.

The spectacle presented at the Premier's offices on June 8th left the decision in no doubt. The sole concern of everyone was to safeguard his own skin and divert responsibilities from himself.

The whole of June 9th was taken up with preparing for the departure, which had been fixed for the evening of the tenth. From Rambouillet the President of the Republic would go to Touraine—the first stage.

I asked for an appointment with M. Paul Reynaud. Marshal Pétain was leaving the War Ministry when I arrived. He had the vacant eye of exhausted old age. When I recall the impression that he left on me that evening—for I did not see him again—I feel for him more pity than anger. And yet!

While I was waiting in the ante-room M. Baudouin came hurrying in, looking very important.

"Who is with the Premier?" he asked of the usher,

aloud. A name was given in reply. He looked annoyed and then, seeing me, said : " Have you an appointment ? "

" Yes."

" I will ask you to allow me to go in before you. I've come from the Foreign Office—it's extremely urgent."

I did a little theory-building. This was the ninth. Italy's entry into the war had been announced for the tenth. My supposition changed to certainty when I entered the study of M. Paul Reynaud, who seemed more on edge than ever. M. Paul Baudouin had just informed him that, according to a message from Rome, Mussolini would " blow the mort " the next day.

Once again I asked him if he was still in favour of passionate, absolute and total resistance, with all its consequences. He made me a staccato and jerky little speech in reply. Was I really being guilty of the insult of doubting his purpose ? I should soon see ! As for the departure from Paris, yes, the Government had decided on it. It would be the next day some time or other. But he would be the last to go. If he were taken prisoner, so much the worse.

" They'll put someone in my place ! " He threw the words like a challenge.

" The news is worse ? "

" Yes."

" But it's still—war at any price ? " I insisted again.

" Yes. Without quarter ! "

I must confess I was not impressed by the tone, bearing, words or gestures. Why had he spoken of the possibility of being taken prisoner ? I put the sally down to his customary love of boasting.

The next day I had the explanation on learning that Mme. de Portes had been playing a fine dramatic scene. She had been talking, if you please, of nothing less than remaining in Paris. She did not want to leave. She was not afraid of the Germans, not she. What was the idea at the back of her mind when she expressed her intention ? Was it a deliberate device calculated to hasten on the



request for an armistice already decided upon in the mind of Weygand and in the will of M. Baudouin? Was it a mere feminine trick, the coquetry of a woman who puts a high price on her presence and wants to be entreated? Or what was it? One can imagine anything of Hélène de Portes. All that is certain is that she went and, in view of what happened afterwards, she could not have done more harm by staying in Paris; she might even have done less. But would Paul Reynaud have gone? How darkly complex it all becomes!

Whether the Ministers met in council or not, did not matter. Next day they would have left Paris, as I hinted to readers of the *Petit Parisien*, who had more than a suspicion of it. They could see lorries driving up to Government offices empty, and coming away laden with records, filing cases and luggage.

June 10th was a crucial date, just as May 10th had been a month before. By a sinister coincidence June 16th would be a replica of May 16th. In future almanacs we shall see under the date June 10th: "Italy declares war on France and Great Britain; the French Government leave Paris."

Throughout that day there was but one ray of light. That was the telegram from Mr. Winston Churchill to M. Paul Reynaud. Let us reproduce the text of this message, which was a solemn affirmation and the promise of loyal British support; it now assumes a value inestimable from the point of view of history.

*"The maximum possible support is being given by British forces in the great battle which the French armies are now conducting with such undaunted courage. All available means are being used to give help on land, sea, and in the air. The R.A.F. has been continually engaged over the battlefields; and within the last few days fresh British forces have landed in France to take their place with those already engaged in the common struggle, whilst further extensive reinforcements are being rapidly organised and will shortly be available."*

It was in the course of the afternoon that the Italian declaration of war was made known to Great Britain

and France by the following communication of Count Ciano to M. François Poncet and Sir Percy Loraine, the French and British Ambassadors in Rome :

*" His Majesty the Emperor and King of Italy declares that from to-morrow, June 11th, Italy considers herself in a state of war with France and Great Britain."*

As its commentary, this text had the traditional Mussolinian oration from the balcony of the Palazzo di Venezia. It is fitting to enshrine here as in a casket the following passage, which will remain in the history of Italy as a challenge to truth and honour which has never yet been equalled, and probably never will be.

*" The hour marked with the seal of destiny has struck, the hour of irrevocable decisions. The Ambassadors of Great Britain and France have already been notified of the declaration of war.*

*" Our conscience is absolutely at ease. The world is witness that Italy has done everything which was humanly possible to avoid war, but all in vain. Henceforward that belongs to the past. To-day we are resolved to brave the risks and sacrifices of war in view of the supreme goal assigned to us by the course of history. Our arms will solve the problems presented by maritime and continental frontiers. The die is cast."*

No doubt Signor Mussolini did not anticipate the bludgeon blow that Mr. Roosevelt was going to bring down on his head by the plain statement of facts in the course of the speech which he pronounced on prize-giving day at the University of Virginia. This portion of the speech deserves to be quoted almost in full, for it confounded, and for ever will confound, Signor Mussolini.

" More than three months ago the Chief of the Italian Government sent me word that because of the determination of Italy to limit as far as possible the spread of the European conflict, more than two hundred million people in the Mediterranean had been enabled to escape the suffering and devastation of war. I informed the Chief of the Italian Government that this desire on the part of Italy to prevent

the war spreading met with the sympathy and response of the Government and people of the United States. I expressed the earnest hopes of this Government that this policy might be continued. I made it clear that in the opinion of the United States Government any extension of hostilities in the Mediterranean might result in a still greater enlargement of the scene of the conflict to the Near East and Africa and that if this came to pass none could foretell how much greater the extension of war might eventually become.

"Subsequently, recognising that certain aspirations of Italy might form the basis of discussions between the powers most specifically concerned, I offered, in a message addressed to the Chief of the Italian Government, to send France and Britain such specific indications of the desires of Italy to obtain readjustment in regard to her position as the Chief of the Italian Government might desire to transmit through me.

"While making it clear that the Government of the United States in such an event could not assume responsibility for the nature of the proposal submitted nor for agreements which might thereafter be reached, I proposed that if Italy would refrain from entering the war I would be willing to ask an assurance from the other Powers concerned that they would faithfully execute any agreement so reached that Italy's voice in any future peace conference would have the same authority as if Italy had actually taken part in the war as a belligerent.

"Unfortunately, the Chief of the Italian Government was unwilling to accept the procedure suggested.

"Our Government's efforts extended to the preservation of peace in the Mediterranean. Our Government expressed the desire to try to collaborate with that of Italy, should the opportunity present itself, in the creation of a world order rendered more stable by the reduction of armaments and by the establishment of a more liberal economic system which would have assured all Powers equality in the markets of the world and in the acquisition of raw materials. In my communication to Signor Mussolini I also compelled myself to express the uneasiness of the Government of the United States, as the extension of the war to the Mediterranean region must inevitably have a prejudicial effect on the mode of life, government and commerce of all the American republics.

"The Government of Italy preferred to preserve 'its liberty of action,' and keep what it calls its promises to the Reich. By so doing it has made manifest its disregard for the rights and security of other nations and for the lives of people of those countries directly threatened by the extension of the war. The Italian Government has given proof that it did not want to try to satisfy its legitimate aspirations by means of legitimate negotiations."

To return to Rome. When M. François Poncet received the declaration of war from the hands of Count Ciano, he asked: "What is the pretext for this declaration of war?" I do not think that he was artless enough to hope that he would be given the real one.

That evening in a broadcast speech, M. Paul Reynaud was at pains to recall "what patience we had shown and what efforts we had made to secure more cordial relations with the Italian Government.

"You know," he went on to state, "that several times I have said publicly, following the example of my predecessors, that there were between Italy and ourselves no problems which could not be solved by friendly negotiation. The highest moral authorities in the world, the Pope and President Roosevelt, have repeatedly tried to prevent this war, which is a challenge to the Christian idea and at the same time to the sentiment of human solidarity. In vain. Signor Mussolini has decided that blood must flow."

And he added: "*Now it is for strength to speak. In the Mediterranean, more even than elsewhere, the Allies are strong.*"

Why did he not remember this before signing his abdication and France's at Bordeaux? This speech gave rise to the most ridiculous of the comedies by which M. Prouvost, the new Minister of Information, distinguished himself.

This Statesman—if such we may call him—had decided as he left for Tours that the Parisians should not have the right to read a paper the next morning. In his name, therefore, a ban on publication for the morrow had been issued to the papers, whose directors, editors

and administrative staffs were, moreover, to follow the Government.

After three hours of shilly-shallying, of decisions taken, cancelled and taken again, not only was the veto withdrawn, but M. Prouvost sent word entreating the directors of these newspapers to issue editions at any cost in order to publish M. Paul Reynaud's speech. This chaos was common to nearly all the Government departments.

The Italian declaration of war did not surprise me. Some days before I had declared it imminent while trying to forestall it by a desperate appeal to the conscience of the man whose actions had counted for much in bringing about the entry of Italy into the war beside the Allies in 1915.

From the words and attitudes of Signor Mussolini I had repeatedly deduced that his heart was definitely with Hitler, but that his choice would depend on his own interest; that is, on our successes or our reverses. In the presence of our successes he would scheme to rob us of the fruit of them. Given reverses to our cause, he would look out for the least costly and most rewarding moment. A disaster would bring him in immediately.

Almost at the beginning of the war a few people happened to be together round my table. Edouard Daladier was one of the guests. The conversation came to bear on Italian policy. We were at one in deciding that Signor Mussolini would wait until he had made up his mind who the probable victor would be before committing himself irrevocably. I recalled the saying of a German statesman: "Italian policy consists in having irons in the fire on all sides," and, finally, that of Jules Cambon in a diplomatic dispatch to M. Poincaré on *Italy's classic system of counter-insurances*. M. Daladier added, "My dear friend, Voltaire put it still better in referring to the Duke of Savoy: 'He always has a foot in both shoes!'"

I had been among those who wanted to bring Italy into a scheme for the encirclement of a Germany whose

power and determination for revenge were again becoming threatening. But the moment I had been calling out for only from a sense of lofty realism in international policy was allowed to slip by.

From the moment when the Rome-Berlin axis was allowed to forge itself, I knew Signor Mussolini too well to give ourselves the slightest chance, apart from force of arms, of winning him back to us. But at the moment when he took the dice to throw them on the German board, I believe he betrayed Italian interests, and was a victim of false calculation of the material and moral forces of the present and the future.

If we are to allow that he made no mistake, then he must have been sure in advance of the Bordeaux felony. That is a point on which the future will throw light.

But if I concede that, being aware of it, he can pat himself on the back for having reasoned or reckoned with skill, I think, nevertheless, that he will learn, thanks to Great Britain and to a France reawakened and revived, that he has, all accounts well and truly made, reasoned and reckoned badly, and that he put on the wrong shoe when he fancied he was putting on the right.

This is the idea upon which I enlarged in the *Petit Parisien* of June 11th, in an article which I make a point of reproducing in full. It interprets, I think, the contemptuous sorrow which every stout-hearted Frenchman felt in the presence of what Mr. Roosevelt called, as we all did, "the stab in the back," and in the presence of what the *New York Times* branded as "jackal's courage."

We expected it, but did not want to believe it. We did not want to believe it because there are sacrilegious gestures and acts against which our reason and our heart rise in revolt.

We did not want to believe it because, if we judge certain men and groups of men to be capable of anything, there are others whom, despite all appearances and indications, we do not want, we cannot allow, to degrade themselves to the level of despoilers of the wounded. We loved them, we were

attached to them by powerful bonds, by kinship of race, by traditions held in common, by the memory of services rendered, by the ties of battles fought shoulder to shoulder, by so many things !

But they ! Yes, they ! No doubt we knew that. Italy had prepared us for it. She had taken boastful pride in announcing that she would do it like that, at the exact moment when she fancied herself sure of finishing us off with the minimum of risk. " We knew it," I say. " We used to say to ourselves every day : ' Will the stab in the back come to-morrow ? ' " And although we knew it, and although we repeated it to ourselves *ad lib.*, yet now it hurts us ! Indignation ? No ! Sadness, infinite sadness, at beholding such evidence of human wretchedness. So that's what men are like ! That's what supposedly great men and so-called noble peoples have come to !

Herr von Bülow, who had considerable associations with Italy, which extended to his choosing an Italian lady of noble birth for his wife, and being really happy only in his Roman villa, had some harsh remarks to make in his memoirs about the traditional policy of Italian statesmen. He asserted, and quoted the Florentine historian, Guicciardini, in support of his thesis, that the Italian statesmen must pray God that he may always be on the stronger side and contrive matters so that he may actually be so.

It is evident that this is the policy which Mussolini has followed. He ranged himself near Hitler, while maintaining the equivocal position of non-belligerence. So long as he had doubts about the success of his associate, he did not personally, perhaps, leave the Allies any hope, but he did not, on the other hand, undeceive those of his compatriots, even of his collaborators, who in Paris and London entertained some illusions. He kept a watchful eye on events : the battle of Flanders, the surrender of Leopold III, the re-embarkation of the armies of the North put an end to his hesitation. If any remained, the approach of the German armies to Paris has decided him.

So—now for the spoils !

Let us not allow bitterness to affect our judgment. If it did there would not be enough hard words at our disposal. Moreover, broken friendship has no right to use them.

Let us have sufficient strength of soul to impose silence on our hearts, which are ready to swell with a righteous anger. Let us not even pronounce Cæsar's *Et tu, Brute*—to the man who murdered him !

As though he felt the reproach of honest consciences rising towards him, Signor Mussolini has gone out of his way to say that his own is absolutely easy. Is he sure of that ?

When he speaks of risks and sacrifices which he is resolved to face, he assuredly believes that he will not have to face many. But we will permit ourselves to recall to him, in order that he may not have too many disappointments in future, the sentence of his Machiavelli, according to whom there is no perfectly safe course : " One imagines one is acting with perfect security, having avoided every danger, only to run into one still greater."

This duly recalled, we have only to await the seal of destiny as the Duce puts it. Fortune appears unfavourable to us, We have faith in the revenge which it will bring in return for the tenacity and constancy we show during the time of storm.

There is not a line, not a word, that I have to strike out. What I thought and wrote on June 10th, I think and write at this moment, a few months later, despite all the arrogance which may give Signor Mussolini the illusion that Great Britain would be less well placed to strike him than she would have been had the Reynaud Government not failed in " the tenacity and constancy during the time of storm," in which I had faith and still have faith. If I despaired, my pen would be already broken.

By way of paradox a friend of mine in Paris used to say when he read some anti-French libel by a specialist in Italian insults : " The Italians," he would say, " have detested us since Brennus."

No doubt Signor Mussolini had thought that for a long while he would have no cause to fear the sword of Brennus.

Let him not count on that ! He has been mistaken about heroic Greece. France, delivered, will avenge " the stab in the back."



## Chapter XXVIII

### The Departure from Paris—Weygand's Demand

FIFTEEN HOURS FROM PARIS TO TOURS—THE THROG ON THE ROAD—GENERAL DE GAULLE REMONSTRATES—THE CONSPIRACY GETS UNDER WAY—AT THE COURT OF THE PREFECTURE AT TOURS—GENERAL WEYGAND DEMANDS THAT A REQUEST FOR AN ARMISTICE BE SENT—MARSHAL PÉTAIN'S DREAM—M. CAMILLE CHAUTEUPS BEGINS HIS NOXIOUS WORK—QUIMPER OR BORDEAUX?—THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF MME.

DE PORTES IT IS TO BE BORDEAUX

It was towards Tours that what still remained of the Government in Paris began to make its way on the evening of June 10th. A communiqué announced that M. Paul Reynaud "was going to visit the armies," in other words G.H.Q., where General Weygand, not by indirect hints this time, but directly and imperatively, would suggest asking for an armistice. M. Mandel, Minister of the Interior, was the last to leave Paris. At the moment when I left my house, my books, my familiar landscape, on the 11th of June, I said: "Let me take a good look at all this. Perhaps we shall never see it again!"

"Who knows? We shall see it if there is an inherent, a pervading justice."

On the roads an uninterrupted procession of lorries, limousines, light cars, coaches and carts were conveying a whole people who were emigrating no one knew whither. There were some who came from the plains of Belgium, from the North, from the East, driven thence by the fighting; from Normandy, whence families who had taken

refuge there at the beginning of the war, as in an inaccessible shelter, now hastened in the face of the looming menace towards they knew not yet what province ; others, finally, came from the capital, from the whole Paris region, where some districts lost almost the whole of their inhabitants.

People of every kind were mingled in this throng : those whose duties or interests compelled them to leave and those who were frankly terrified by the prospect of contact with the invader : old men, women, youngsters, children, all sorts and conditions of mankind ; groups of young folk who, even in misfortune, were yet determined to find amusement in the slightest incident along the road ; youths from ten to fifteen or sixteen years who slipped in and out on bicycles among the strings of vehicles, laughing as they went ; for them it was almost a great adventure ; and, hard by, old folk, their faces worn by anxiety, sitting on trunks or cases, carrying with them what they had been able to grasp, at random seemingly, at the moment of flight.

In the hamlets, villages and towns it was impossible to find a bit of bread ; others who had gone that way already had exhausted all supplies ; in certain places the inhabitants shut themselves up behind their doors as though they feared that all this crowd might requisition their mattresses ! Elsewhere the line passed between two hedges of curious onlookers, who stared as if watching a procession ; at times a breach opened at a cross-roads, and then the dense crowd came together again as tightly as before ; progress was yard by yard. All this lasted for more than fifteen hours. A trifling misery in comparison with the great, the very great, ones which oppressed us, and the even greater ones which would overwhelm us in the future.

At Tours the Government was dispersed in the châteaux in the neighbourhood. The President of the Republic was in one, the Prime Minister in another, while the Ministers and Ambassadors were dispersed here and there about the

capital of the Department of Indre et Loire. M. Mandel, the Minister of the Interior, took up his quarters at the Prefecture, which would be the centre of the Government.

General Headquarters were at Briare, where General Weygand was preparing his great operation. In his mind there was no question of "driving the enemy out of France," which could not possibly be done for a long while; nor was he thinking of what should properly be his task, of organising "somewhere in France" a defensive force which would preserve some portion of the national soil. It was another man who was thinking of that task; who was drawing up a scheme in broad outline, and who would adjure M. Paul Reynaud to make it his own.

M. Paul Reynaud listened to General de Gaulle. He understood quickly, for his intelligence was swift:

"Withdraw towards the Breton stronghold, hold out there as long as possible, assemble all fit troops and ask Churchill to transport them, some to North Africa and the rest to England, to form a nucleus for the return battle; save the whole air force; the navy continuing to co-operate in the defence of the two Empires in alliance."

"Yes. But what about Weygand?" inquired Paul Reynaud.

"Weygand? Are you the head of the Government?"

I can picture General de Gaulle's tall figure towering over Paul Reynaud and I can hear him whispering emphatically in his ear:

"When a general has lost all fighting sense, he is replaced by someone else."

Paul Reynaud will not say that he does not dare—on the contrary, he declares that he is ready to do it. But who? Who would take the responsibility of so arduous an enterprise? Huntziger? Perhaps? Or—if de Gaulle went to sound Huntziger gently . . . he asks him to. . . . Perhaps to-morrow. . . . And if de Gaulle flew to London and explained everything to Churchill because of the troopships and transports. . . .

"Yes, obviously, that's excellent. . . . Draw me up a regular scheme. . . ."

But how could Reynaud put this scheme into execution? Neither Hélène de Portes, who would exclaim: "Your precious de Gaulle would do better to go and counter-attack somewhere with his tanks," nor Baudouin, who fiercely but more artfully would raise a host of objections, nor Weygand, who declared to him: "If we want to save anything there is nothing for it but to capitulate," nor Pétain, who would say "Amen!" to everything that Weygand said, nor Chaumemps, who would draw the Radicals in the Government with him—none of these would sanction what they termed a piece of madness.

All this Paul Reynaud told himself as he paced round his Cabinet room like a wild cat in a cage.

He certainly had reason to meditate, for the conspirators were making arrangements, drawing up plans, allotting parts, preparing the atmosphere; there were secret conclaves just as there were almost open discussions.

From the morning of the twelfth the atmosphere of the court at the Prefecture was revealing.

We were living in an extraordinary period in which humanity appeared in all the crudeness of its faults or of its good qualities. Every, or almost every, man was compelled by the influence of events to lay down his mask. The fearful, the dastardly, and the vile could not hide themselves; willy-nilly they flaunted themselves without shame!

As for lofty feelings, those who had them were transfigured by them.

Look at that Minister passing, firm of aspect, strong, well set-up. Yes, look at his greenish face and the way he bends his head as though yearning to be kicked. Look at that gentleman with the generous display of stripes on his sleeve bowing devoutly before Mme. de Portes who, worried and short of temper, is scrutinising the passers-by in order to pick out *her* people: a regular court form/

about her : she distributes crumbs of her noble thoughts, and in venomous tones casts suspicions on " the war-mongers who have brought us to this ! "

Henry de Kérillis goes by. One might say of him that he has no balance, that he has been unjust towards the best among Frenchmen, and that he has recognised it. One might add that his interventions are sometimes clumsy and excessive, and that he did harm to his anti-defeatist campaign by acts of extravagance and imprudence—all this, anything you like one might say of him, but he has something which excuses and often effaces the gravest errors—for his country he has a love and devotion without measure. Distress, when I saw him, furrowed his cheeks more than usual and lent a hint of wildness to his eyes. Regardless whether he was overheard, he cried : " The defeatist clique are making desperate efforts." That time he was not exaggerating.

Glimpses were seen, as it prowled about, of a tall, thick silhouette, that of a man possessed by personal fear. Further glimpses would be seen next day and again at Bordeaux. Real fear I saw then, added to the anxiety of being unable to take cover, to flee, to hide. Let us note that he could, and indeed would be able to, but his fear was so absorbing that he could think nothing and say nothing but : " Could I find a place of safety ? "—or something of the sort.

I was sorry for him for that degree of fear is a disease ; so I will not pass on his name to posterity.

In the hotels, restaurants and streets of Tours there was extraordinary confusion. All the " rank and fashion " of Paris was there, so was " anybody who is anybody " in politics ; journalists ; men of letters, too ; and the throng of people who had started at random, failed to find a bed, and were sleeping in their cars, if they had them, or in dormitories, and who ate when and where they could.

I met a Parisian lady of title who flung herself upon

me ; she was looking for a flat, a villa, and I don't know what else in which to install herself.

My first instinct was to be brutal and tell her the truth. Then I thought : " What's the good ? There are enough people scared already. Let us respect this person's peace of mind."

Uneasiness hovered above every head, but it was only a few who could discern it clearly.

The mental agony came less from the progress of the enemy invasion than from what General Weygand had resolved upon, after having patiently established the main heads of his work some days before. Naturally, he had said nothing of it to Mr. Churchill at the meeting of the Supreme War Council which he had just attended. He suffered his press bureau to allow some military critic, whose confidence was only equalled by his mediocrity, to write as though the general had secretly confided to him all that was in the background as well as in the foreground of his mind.

" A moment will come, I solemnly assure all those who follow my commentaries, when General Weygand, having obtained equality of resources, or perhaps slightly more than that, will order our troops to turn about and hustle the enemy back."

The general set off for the Council of Ministers, where he was going to engage in a violent assault. In a preliminary Council the day before he had cleared himself of responsibility.

He did not lose himself in oratorical precautions. He had made and made again a sketch of the military position that was as black as, and perhaps blacker than, the reality. It was not a defeat, it was a rout, it was collapse, complete and relentless.

" I have saved honour. I am no longer in a position to stem the enemy's advance." He asserted that the soldiers were not fighting any more, that they were throwing away their arms and running away, that mutinies were to be

feared, perhaps worse. "Let us remember 1917," he exclaimed, "when Russian soldiers formed Soviets in the regiments and in the armies."

And he concluded: "There is no other solution except an immediate request for an armistice."

Deep down in his mind he imagined that he would obtain "honourable" conditions from Germany. He still had a certain number of reliable, well-officered divisions which would suffice to restore order in case the revolutionaries attempted to disturb it. But there was not a moment to lose and it was the Government's duty to make up its mind without delay.

What was the attitude of the Ministers during this speech, of which I guarantee *not* the actual words but the sense?

The marshal gave tremulous nods of approval. M. Baudouin, who was forewarned, made a poor job of disguising his complete agreement. M. Camille Chautemps conveyed by grimaces a false surprise and a false amazement, while he endeavoured to find out what advantage he might derive from this with a little deft trickery. The marshal at once rallied to the opinion of General Weygand.

The propaganda about the *regeneration of France by nobly accepting defeat*, the scheme of which I disclosed in a previous chapter, had exerted its influence on his aged brain. It had been hinted to him that he would have a great part to play, the part of Father of the People, to follow up his rôle of Father of the Soldier in 1917, when he had opposed any offensive until the arrival of American reinforcements. He had been made to believe, to a greater extent, indeed, than General Weygand imagined, that with the legend attaching to him he would obtain a generous peace from Hitler, involving no loss—or almost none. In his afternoon naps he would see a Hitler disguised as Siegfried begging the glorious Pétain to come and meet him, and, in some tent, as in the heroic age of the Napoleonic armies, they would meet alone and Hitler,

getting up, would say : " Marshal, I am going to show the world my magnanimity. You conquered twenty-two years ago, I have conquered to-day. We are quits. Let us make peace."

And the guttural German sounds emitted nothing but insignificant claims, something like de Monzie's " chicken-feed " when the latter was thinking of satiating Italy.

The men who for months, even years, had gambled on his senile degeneration in order to establish their power behind his flag, likewise pointed out to him that he was the providential man destined to restore to France her aureole of Eldest Daughter of the Church.

Other temptresses—though not the same as Pétain's—had, for their part, whispered to Weygand " You will be king ! " And he had listened to them with satisfaction.

M. Paul Reynaud, who had the vigorous words of General de Gaulle in his mind and who, after all, when he moved heaven and earth to hoist himself to power, had not had for his dreams what Weygand now demanded, betrayed on June 12th no hint of weakening. He had signed an alliance with Great Britain. He was bound by it. He would honour the signature of France as he would his own. He was, moreover, convinced, he declared in a tone whose bluntness carried weight, that we could still hold our ground. At this Weygand shook his head.

" It's a question of determination," put in Mandel.

Weygand glared at the Minister of the Interior. Baudouin raised his brows several times. " It won't be easy to get round that fellow," he thought.

M. Paul Reynaud maintained the firm position he had taken up. The majority of the Council seemed disposed to follow him. M. Chautemps was careful not to come into direct conflict with the Premier. He balanced the two opposing arguments, acknowledging that both had much weight. He flattered in turn the Marshal and General Weygand, whose opinions had impressed him, and the Prime Minister, who since he had taken office had



shown unequalled qualities of statesmanship. It was M. Chautemps who said all this. He had been greatly struck, he continued, by M. Paul Reynaud's words about the Franco-British alliance. Certainly the sacrilegious thought of being false to it was far from his mind. He had too much respect for contracts and, *a fortiori*, for a contract of this worth with a gallant ally.

"But if the disaster is such that General Weygand's solution cannot be avoided, is it not possible to find a conciliatory formula which would unite us all?"

"Yes, let us be united—we must be united," interrupted the President of the Republic smugly.

Mandel pitched his voice low, but his neighbours heard him.

"A conciliatory formula," he said sarcastically. "Something like an amendment to a proposed Bill dealing with a local railway."

M. Chautemps did not hear or pretended not to have understood.

"Why should not the Prime Minister," he went on, "whose authority stands so high with the British Government, ask Mr. Winston Churchill to release France from her pledge?"

As he enlarged upon his astute suggestion, M. Baudouin's face lit up; those of a certain number of ministers who were afraid of becoming heroes despite themselves, grew more placid. Even M. Reynaud admitted that there might be something in the idea. He would think it over, broach the subject gently to Churchill—

"It must be done quickly!" Weygand struck in.

"Even were I to be alone, and I imagine I shall not be," said Mandel in a voice that fell like an axe, "I will have no part in a capitulation which would dishonour us."

Then he raised the question of the next removal of the Government, a point necessarily brought to the fore by the advance of the German armies. The supporters of the armistice unanimously proposed Bordeaux. The

choices of those in favour of continued resistance included Clermont-Ferrand, Toulouse, and Perpignan. M. Mandel showed that he had already considered the possibility of Quimper. M. Reynaud, who had been attracted by de Gaulle's Brest scheme, approved and supported the suggestion. Quimper was Brittany. It meant the port of Brest with possible communications with England, America and North Africa.

And thus it was decided.

When M. Mandel returned to the Prefecture in the middle of the night, he telephoned immediately to the Prefecture of Finistère to say that châteaux, hotels, and so forth should be requisitioned in Quimper and the neighbourhood for two days from then, in order to house the members of the Government and the staffs of the various departments.

While he was doing so, M. Paul Reynaud, who had returned to the Château de Chissay, where he was staying, was a prey to the fury of Mme. de Portes.

"What is this ridiculous joke about going to Quimper? Are you anxious to make a fool of yourself? I certainly don't propose to go and sleep in Breton four poster beds! Go to Quimper by yourself, my friend, you and your Mandel!"

General de Gaulle, who was present, defended the proposed departure for Brittany. Baudouin skilfully argued against it. Quimper! But the movement of the German armies was already tending unmistakably in the direction of Brittany. To go there was worse than risky. The choice of Brittany as a place of refuge for the Government would only have been desirable if precautions had been taken to organise solid lines of defence in front of that province and in it. Whereas by going to Bordeaux, where there were plenty of hotels, and châteaux were numerous, they would have elbow-room and a field of vision in which to see approaching events.

In between whiles telephone calls kept reaching M. Paul

Reynaud, all insisting to this same effect. He yielded, and got in touch with M. Mandel. Orders to Quimper were countermanded and Bordeaux was warned to expect them.

During this heated, confused and grotesque argument, General de Gaulle had the foreboding that a fearful mistake was being made. That was M. Mandel's opinion. It was mine. But I did not learn of this fatal change of plan until the next morning.

At his château in Touraine Paul Reynaud was not to have much sleep. The question of Quimper or Bordeaux settled, the argument next turned to the war itself and to General Weygand's demand that they should sue for an armistice.

I have allowed it to be whispered in my ear that the discussion was particularly painful. Whether this was so or not, it was necessary to wait and see what reply Mr. Winston Churchill would give to the insidious request suggested by M. Camille Chautemps.

M. Mandel, whom I saw at the close of this sad day, did not hide his pessimism from me. For myself, I had a definite revelation of the shame with which France was going to be soiled.

It was a ghastly night in which I debated within myself what resolves I should probably have to take.

In face of General Weygand's demand, of the senile collapse of the marshal, of the crafty and ardent will of M. Baudouin, and of the cunning of M. Chautemps, served—all of them—by the incredible power of Mme. de Portes—how much weight would Paul Reynaud's noble ambition carry?

As vigilant defenders of the interests of France there were only M. Mandel and General de Gaulle. Would they suffice? Probably not! I determined not to give up my principles. In no case would I have any share in the crime and the capitulation. Exile, rather than that. In my own circle—pray forgive this intimately personal allusion—my decision was approved. I should not have to argue the matter with myself again. Facts would command.

## Chapter XXIX

### A Crucial Day

ARRIVAL OF MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL—A MOVING CONFERENCE WITH M. PAUL REYNAUD—INCREDIBLE SCENES IN THE HALL OF THE PREFECTURE—MME. DE PORTES WANTS AN ARMISTICE—M. PAUL REYNAUD SAYS TO ME: "CAPITULATE? NEVER!"—THE MESSAGE TO MR. ROOSEVELT AN ERROR—GENERAL WEYGAND RENEWS HIS ULTIMATUM—DUEL OF WORDS BETWEEN GENERAL WEYGAND AND M. MANDEL—TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN M. MANDEL AND M. LANGERON—"DO NOT YIELD!"—M. PAUL REYNAUD'S DISAPPOINTING STATEMENT

THE thirteenth of June. Another crucial day. Step by step the cumulative agony of the tragedy was increasing.

Mr. Winston Churchill had been informed of the argument dividing the French Council of Ministers. He responded to the appeal made to him by M. Paul Reynaud that he should come to Tours to consult with the French Government. He knew that he would be asked to release France from the pledge she had signed not to negotiate either a separate armistice or peace. The matter was of exceptional gravity, and he got Lord Halifax and Lord Beaverbrook to accompany him. In the state of disorganisation caused by the constant advance of the invaders communications between England and France were not easy. Mr. Churchill reached the Prefecture of Tours even before M. Paul Reynaud had received the announcement of his departure; so much so, indeed, that he found

there only the single officer who was on duty that day during the lunch hour. M. Mandel himself was in conference elsewhere. But this officer, a member of M. Mandel's personal staff, was a person of outstanding quality. He bore a name glorious in the history of French diplomacy. He was the son of Revoil, who represented France with such skilful courage at the Conference of Algeciras, and who was Governor-General of Algeria and an Ambassador. Having sent word to the Premier's residence to inform him of the visitor's arrival, he took the British Prime Minister off to lunch.

These details, which are no more than the minor trimmings of history, are not without interest as background to the great and painful events which they accompanied.

M. Baudouin arrived as an advance guard, and M. Paul Reynaud, duly informed, hastened to join Mr. Churchill. Without waiting for his chief, who would presumably have brought greater discretion to the task, M. Baudouin did not miss the opportunity to describe the situation as desperate. For that matter, he had only to repeat the remarks made the day before by General Weygand. Fortunately, Mr. Winston Churchill has a robust head. It would need more than the single blow of M. Baudouin's hammer to crush it.

Even so, he might have preferred gentler methods. And then came M. Paul Reynaud.

The interview, which took place in one of the official rooms of the Prefecture, lasted a good long while. All about, in the corridors, the hall and the courtyard, there was a crowd. Ministers were among them, Frossard for one. As his head was sunk forward and he was flaying no one with his tongue, I deduced that his energy would not extend very far; there were politicians, journalists, functionaries, place-hunters—all the hubbub of the Parliamentary lobbies during great Ministerial crises—and a woman, a woman who came and went between the hall

and the courtyard, a woman who wanted to get into the room where Reynaud and Churchill were conferring, a woman who was prevented from doing so and grew impatient, sending for Baudouin, reminding him of his promises, urging him to use all his influence with Reynaud.

"Tell Paul that we must give up—give up. We must make an end of it. There must be an armistice! Tell Paul so, won't you?—from me. I insist on it."

That is all that could be heard of a conversation, the mere sight of which was a challenge. Although she was very sickly, she recalled the Shakespearian heroine who, before the murder of Duncan, cried shame on Macbeth for his hesitancy: "*Art thou afeared to be the same in thine own act and valour as thou art in desire, letting I dare not wait upon I would?*"

And since Baudouin, withheld by prudent fears, beat about the bush: "If only she were Baudouin," she thought to herself, that she might rush in and tell Churchill what she thought and what was her will.

Yes, the shrew of the court of the Prefecture at Tours thought, like Lady Macbeth: "*Unsex me here . . . make thick my blood . . . stop up the access and passage to remorse . . . take my milk for gall. . . .*"

There was something of that. With the difference that it was not a matter of killing a man, but of stabbing England and burying France alive in a grave.

This woman was Hélène de Portes, with her face wearing an angry expression and her hair ruffled.

A moment came when a man in uniform lost patience. He took advantage of M. Baudouin's return to the hall to say to him bluntly, as he pointed to where she was standing quite unaware: "Get that woman out of here, for the dignity of France. If not, I'll do it myself!"

At the conclusion of the conference, Mr. Winston Churchill, Lord Halifax and Lord Beaverbrook expected, from the message that had been sent to them in London,

to deliberate with the French Cabinet. Was there a misunderstanding, or was the idea abandoned for fear that Churchill might sway certain Ministers by his persuasive energy? I do not know. No more than a brief interview with M. Jeanneney, M. Herriot and M. Mandel, from which, incidentally, they took away an excellent impression, was contrived for them. The Speakers of the Senate and of the Chamber were particularly vigorous. As for Mandel, his opinion was known to them and it could not change.

By a fortunate chance I met M. Reynaud face to face at a bend in a corridor as he was coming out from the conference.

"You're not capitulating?" I asked with breathless anxiety.

"Never."

On an impulse I added, almost with entreaty: "If you are for resistance at any price, I am wholeheartedly behind you."

"I know. Don't worry. But I'm forcing the note of despair to get the English to give us the maximum of the help we need so much."

I breathed again—it was not the end—so there was still some hope that reason and honour would triumph.

When Churchill left, his eyes were red. He was indescribably affected. And how should he not have been?

The enormous responsibilities weighing on his spirit advised him, as Prime Minister, not to go beyond the rigid legal limit, and to say: "*You owe strict fidelity to the obligations you have signed.*"

His old affection for France and for all that it represents, the memory of the common struggle, a human sense of relationship between friendly peoples and a political view of the future—all these encouraged him not to be hard on the ally who was in an almost desperate plight; so many noble thoughts from which M. Baudouin would later attempt to draw profit in order to justify the completed crime.

Mr. Churchill did not accede to the Chaumonts-Reynaud request, but his reply was not wholly negative. M. Reynaud had sent a message to Mr. Roosevelt, in which he conjured him : "*To declare publicly that the United States would grant the Allies their moral and material support by every means short of sending an expeditionary force.*" In other words, he asked him to pronounce a declaration of war on Germany. The two heads of Governments agreed to await Mr. Roosevelt's reply, after which they would reconsider the situation.

This Mr. Winston Churchill made unmistakably plain in the following terms during his speech in the House of Commons on June 25th :

" M. Reynaud, the courageous Prime Minister, asked me to come to Tours, which I did on June 13th, accompanied by the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Aircraft Production, Lord Beaverbrook. I see that some accounts have been given of these conversations by the Bordeaux Government, which do not at all correspond with the facts. We have, of course, a record kept by one of the Cabinet secretaries who came with us, and I do not propose to go into this now at any length.

" M. Reynaud, after dwelling on the conditions at the front and the state of the French Army, with which I was well acquainted, asked me whether Great Britain would release France from her obligation not to negotiate for an armistice or peace without the consent of her British Ally. Although I knew how great French sufferings were, and that we had not so far endured equal trials or made an equal contribution in the field, I felt bound to say that I could not give consent. I think there would be no use in adding mutual reproaches to the other miseries we might have to bear, but I could not give consent. We agreed that a further appeal should be made by M. Reynaud to the United States, and that if the reply was not sufficient to enable M. Reynaud to go on fighting—and he, after all, was the fighting spirit—then we should meet again and take a decision in the light of the factors."



Did or did not Mr. Winston Churchill disclose the blunder that M. Reynaud had committed, either of his own accord or owing to crafty suggestion, in begging of Mr. Roosevelt the entry of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies? Mr. Roosevelt had gone to the extreme limit of what public opinion authorised. The future remained free. At no price ought it to be advanced or prejudged. By trying to force Mr. Roosevelt, it was only possible to obtain a reply, morally encouraging, but negative in fact and one on which the defeatists would immediately seize to say to M. Paul Reynaud: "You have tried everything, your conscience is free as regards England and towards yourself. Surrender!"

This is just what happened during the days which followed. But Mr. Churchill was able to count himself guaranteed, and England, like France, with him, by the solemn pledges which M. Paul Reynaud had taken in his message to the President of the United States, which recorded the thesis of M. Mandel and General de Gaulle.

*"To-day the enemy is at the gates of Paris. We will fight before Paris, we will fight behind Paris, we will shut ourselves up in one of our provinces, and if we are driven out we will go to North Africa, and, if necessary, to our possessions in America."*

Churchill, Lord Halifax and Lord Beaverbrook took off again for London.

A French Council of Ministers was immediately decided upon. Before going to it, M. Mandel telephoned to M. Langeron, the Prefect of Police. The call was slow in coming through. The Minister was obliged to join his colleagues at the Château de Cangé, the temporary official residence of the President of the Republic. You will see presently that these details are not unnecessary. After a few minutes M. Langeron was on the telephone. It was six o'clock in the evening. He was asked on behalf of the Minister if anything abnormal was happening in Paris, whether the Germans were yet reported in sight.

The Prefect of Police answered :

"In Paris the most complete order reigns ; German advance guards are reported in the suburbs joining on to the capital, notably at Pantin and Aubervilliers ; we're expecting them to-morrow. Assure the Minister that all his instructions are being and will be faithfully carried out."

M. Langeron's words were almost immediately sent on to M. Mandel and reached him just as he was taking his place at the council table.

M. Reynaud reported the gist of the conference which he had just had with Mr. Winston Churchill. General Weygand reiterated his ultimatum of the day before in even more emphatic terms. They must ask for an armistice. News from the army was becoming more and more alarming.

He struck an attitude and, drawing a paper from his file, he said gravely, laying stress on his words :

*"Gentlemen, if I say we can wait no longer, it is not without reason. I have just had a telegram sent from the Admiralty, from which it appears that serious disturbances have broken out in Paris, and that Thorez has installed himself at the Ellysée."*

M. Lebrun started. All the members of the Council were thunderstruck, except one whose thin lips parted in a Mephistophelian smile. He did not stop General Weygand, who insisted ponderously on the importance of the Parisian riots reported in the telegram. Barely raising his finger, M. Mandel indicated to the President that he had something to say :

*"The Minister of the Interior has leave to speak."*

*"I should like to reassure you, Mr. President, and also the Commander-in-Chief and the whole body of the Council. There are no riots in Paris and M. Thorez, Mr. President, will not sleep in your bed this evening."*

General Weygand looked the insolent fellow who dared to contradict him up and down, but M. Mandel continued :

*"Before coming here I had M. Langeron rung up on the telephone, but the call did not come through until after I had left. However, my private secretary informed me a few moments ago that he had spoken to the Prefect of Police, that the Germans were at Pantin and Aubervilliers, but that order reigned in Paris. . . ."*

"Are you doubting my word?" cut in the Generalissimo harshly.

"I am not doubting your word, but I have an equal confidence in that of M. Langeron, whose high personal and administrative qualities I well know."

M. Chautemps thought it advisable to act as a buffer between the two men. "Er—possibly M. Langeron is not properly informed . . ."

"Why should the Admiralty, which is not in Paris, be better informed than the Prefect of Police, who is? Besides, we can soon get to the bottom of this business."

M. Mandel had another call put through to Paris. A few minutes later he was speaking to M. Langeron, and informed him of the supposed entry of the Communist Thorez into the Elysée. From the other end, M. Langeron burst out laughing, and denied the story, adding circumstantial details about the calm which had not ceased to prevail in the capital. M. Mandel repeated aloud all the Prefect's answers, then addressing M. Lebrun: "If you would care to hear for yourself, Mr. President, the information which I have just repeated, in order that a civilian's word should not be doubted . . ."

"Oh! My dear Minister, I wouldn't dream of it."

General Weygand looked somewhat crestfallen. It was clear that the Bolshevik danger card had been trumped. To all impartial members of the Council it appeared that the Generalissimo had just engaged upon a political operation which went far to explain his insistence in favour of an armistice.

M. Mandel, who had no reason to consider General Weygand's feelings, since the latter had shown him

unmistakable hostility, did not stop at that. In his opinion we could not renounce the signature given to England, and it was difficult for England to release us. It was at least premature to count on Mr. Roosevelt's declaration of war against Germany. If the army was not in condition to fight, then *it* would capitulate. There were precedents for that, the case of Bazaine, but the Government could not give legal sanction to the capitulation when it had in reserve the fleet, the air force, and the planes coming from America, and when there was the whole Empire to save.

If M. Paul Reynaud had pushed home his advantages that evening, General Weygand would have been outvoted, even though the party for resistance was showing signs of weakening beneath ever-increasing pressure.

Thus it was that M. Ybarnegaray, who had been until then one of the "no-compromise" men, went over, from blind faith in the genius of Weygand, to the other camp.

But M. Paul Reynaud was definitely one of those highly-strung people who cannot maintain their maximum tenacity for long. Taken in hand again by Mme. de Portes, M. Baudouin, and by his whole set, he was at night no more than a deflated balloon.

At eight o'clock in the evening he had had it announced that he was going to broadcast a statement. It was put back hour after hour, so much so that it was before hearing it that I hastily wrote the following note, which I called: "*Do not Yield*":

*"Never was it truer that great griefs are mute. If at the news of the most hideous shames throats are too tightly compressed to allow many words to pass, in the same way the pen trembles between paralysed fingers as if the heart was about to stop beating.*

*"No, no, let us not lay overmuch stress on the wounds, reopened each day, of that queen, our France, who did not deserve such things.*

*"The blood flows from almost her every limb. But she is*

*not dead and because she is not, and is resolved not to die, she compels us not to resign ourselves to despair. Is it rashness this confidence which is determined not to yield? No, since Churchill does not disarm, since Paul Reynaud does not let his hands fall to his sides, since the French Government is stiffening under his influence into fierce resolution."*

This appeared on the morning of June 14th. It was to be my last article in the *Petit Parisien*.

The last lines are clear enough. They were accurate. For Mr. Churchill they corresponded to the statement which M. Paul Reynaud had made me in the afternoon. Only the last phrase went beyond the truth since it attributed "a fierce resolution" to the whole Government, which I doubted, but was anxious to inculcate into it.

When at length the statement was issued it disappointed everyone. It was neither what I wanted nor what the Generalissimo would have made it. It was a strange mixture in which the double Governmental current circulated. It was not "*We will yield*," neither was it "*We must not yield*," still less did it reveal the fierce resolution with which I thought fit to credit them.

At least nothing was absolutely lost. It was at Bordeaux that the last act of the tragedy would be played. Meanwhile the Germans made their entry into Paris.

## Chapter XXX

### Eve of Catastrophe

M. PIERRE LAVAL PERSUADES MARSHAL PÉTAIN THAT HIS HOUR IS COMING—M. CHAUMPS APPOINTS HIMSELF RECRUITING OFFICER OF CAPITULATION AND DEVISES A STRATAGEM—M. GEORGES MANDEL DISPLAYS INTENSE ACTIVITY—M. LÉON BLUM'S ANGUISH—ALTERNATING COURAGE AND DEPRESSION OF M. PAUL REYNAUD—SIR RONALD CAMPBELL, A GREAT AMBASSADOR, A GREAT ENGLISHMAN, AND A GREAT FRIEND OF FRANCE—MME. HÉLÈNE DE PORTES PASSES ALL BOUNDS—M. MANDEL WARNS THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS THAT ON NO ACCOUNT WILL HE DISHONOUR HIMSELF—PESSIMISTIC ESTIMATE OF THE VOTING—WHAT MM. ALBERT LEBRUN, JEANNENEY, HERRIOT, AND PAUL REYNAUD OUGHT, BUT FAIL, TO SAY

So we have come to the eve of the catastrophe. The scene of it is Bordeaux. Ever since the arrival here on the evening of the fourteenth the atmosphere had been troubled. When in the night of June 12th-13th, Mme. de Portes rebelled against the choice of Brittany and demanded the gentle skies of the Bordeaux region, it was not mere whim on her part: it was calculation.

Already the capital of Guyenne, with its M.P. mayor, the ex-Socialist Marquet, was an active centre of defeatism, where, from fear of bombing (of which there had been only one instance), a crowd of Parisian aristocrats and *bourgeois* had taken refuge since the beginning of the war. Constantly sighing, "When will this war be over!" they were a precious crew who, when the Government left

Tours, were reinforced by new arrivals who had come direct from Paris without stopping in Touraine.

The Government's withdrawal to Bordeaux was the signal for politicians to come flocking from all sides. For some who came, like Léon Blum at Mandel's request, to prevent Reynaud from giving way, there were many more who arrived as team-mates of Baudouin, Chautemps and Marquet. According to rumours which I have not been able to verify, the last-named telephoned to M. Pierre Laval, who was keeping a watchful eye open at Clermont Ferrand, to say: "Come! There's work to be done!" Whether the words were really pronounced or not, they are a condensed summary of the understanding, which has been already clearly established, between the two men who were bent on the same object.

Indeed, immediately on his arrival M. Pierre Laval's actions began to make themselves felt in all quarters, either directly or through intermediaries. The horror of war, the frightful consequences of invasion, the possible slaughter, the threat of Bolshevism—these were all themes on which, now sentimental, now sarcastic, he waxed eloquent, fitting his choice to the nature of his interlocutors. And he had many. He was only acting to his own advantage but, without compromising himself personally with anyone, he made use of all indiscriminately.

Within the Government, the divisions which had revealed themselves at Tours became more marked. The camps were clearly divided. They were of almost equal strength at Tours with a faint preponderance in favour of Reynaud and Mandel. But under various impulses the balance would swing over to the Weygand-Pétain-Baudouin side. M. Laval's persuasions would transform the Marshal, who, from having been hitherto a passive figure almost in tow behind Weygand, would become the most active element in the capitulation—in this connection it is well to recall the long conversation I had with M. Pierre Laval, and which I recorded in Chapter XI. The Marshal did not

know that the men who were exploiting his prestige and stimulating his senile vanity were whispering sardonically : " We shall only ask him to be a statue on a pedestal." They proved to him—which was not difficult—that the hour had come for him to put his marshal's bâton in the scales. Indeed, the hour was coming when he would cry like a king on a throne : " Enough of this ! "

And that would suffice. We have not yet come to that, but we are not very far from it.

We have seen that already at Tours M. Ybarnegaray had come to take his stand behind the Generalissimo. Already, too, M. Frossard was weakening, without having ever been very stout-hearted.

He admired Mandel who, however, alarmed him. On the other hand, the tortuous wiles of Chautemps and the Machiavellism of Laval intrigued him, all the more because, fundamentally, though he denied it, he shared their lack of patriotism.

But M. Laval as yet was only a Pretender and, however adroit he might be, he had not yet attained his position. The man whose attitude would decide the fate of the country and of the alliance was M. Camille Chautemps, vice-Premier, Radical-Socialist Senator, ex-Premier, and a prominent Freemason.

Directly M. Camille Chautemps saw General Weygand take the road leading towards an armistice and capitulation, he ranged himself behind him. His nature led him easily towards that step. It was he, let us not forget, who at Tours suggested the trick of asking Mr. Winston Churchill to release France from her obligation to Great Britain.

Courage in confronting events has never been the characteristic of M. Camille Chautemps, who has always been more ready to evade than to face them. In 1937 he might have been the man responsible for the economic, social and military recovery of France. That involved not stopping at half-measures, it meant going straight and hard for the men in his path and overcoming resistance.



He only made a show of this, and, at the first opportunity, the eve of the *Anschluss*, slipped away as though by chance. It was safe to predict that, should unhappy circumstances arise during the war, he would be among the first, not to propose, but to follow anyone who proposed what, for the sake of courtesy, we might call an arrangement. That was why, thinking of him and of certain others, I was so persistent in asking that France and Great Britain should pledge themselves neither to negotiate nor to sign a separate peace.

He thought himself supremely clever in clinging tightly to the back of Weygand, the man whom in earlier days he used to call sarcastically the "reactionary of the *Action Française*." Now he saw himself reinstated by his former adversaries. He gave the honour of France for a problematical mess of pottage.

He was expecting that they would accept him next day as their leader. He was ready in time of defeat to scoop up a Premiership made old and worn by professional distortion !

Accordingly he appointed himself official advocate of General Weygand's thesis against Reynaud and Mandel and against the party leaders, Jeanneney and Herriot. Not only did he show his hand within the Cabinet by well-timed interventions, but in private conclaves, where his genius for petty intrigue won him facile successes among mediocrities, he made himself the recruiting officer of the partisans of treachery.

He had the art of minimising the graver side of things and magnifying the unimportant. He knew how to worm his way, as it were, into problems in order to poison the marrow of them. The accent of truth was in his words at the very moment when his face gave it the lie. His whole political make-up was a peculiar mixture, sometimes attractive, sometimes disappointing, often disturbing, a mixture of provincial attorney, secret society conspirator, well-educated little *bourgeois*, and of parliamentarian

brought up among the intrigues of the lobbies. Some times he showed eloquence, but it was never lofty: even when elegance of phrase lent an illusion of it, his speech remained pedestrian, delighting in the intricacies of grassy paths.

Oh! He did not wax hot against England. He was far too prudent. He nursed the future. There was no knowing. To-morrow, perhaps, he might be Head of the Government. No! He paid tribute to the ally. But Churchill would certainly understand! He had understood! They would even render him a service! That would permit him to make a bloodless peace with Germany, whilst we, with Pétain and Weygand as banner, would not lose much. And then, what else could be done since Pétain and Weygand, a Marshal and the Commander-in-Chief, both declared that it was necessary to capitulate? We were *covered* by them. Indeed, more than that, one could not go against their judgment. It had so often been proclaimed that they were not to be touched, that they were *taboo*; in the communiqués and in the Press they had been guaranteed before public opinion as the only possible saviours. How could anyone disavow them by failing to associate himself with their decision?

It was not possible.

For perhaps the tenth time in the morning he was pronouncing this little speech on 'a pavement before the door of the Royal Gascony Hotel. It was between noon and one o'clock. I approached and, having overheard him, took the liberty of interrupting.

"Do you believe," I asked him, "that when France has capitulated, Germany will not occupy the greater part of the country and squeeze her by the throat?"

"No!" he confessed.

"Then," I insisted, "since the capitulation will not avoid the occupation, why do you wish France to dishonour herself?"

He hedged.

"One cannot go against the opinion of Weygand and Pétain. Reynaud has made too much play with their names."

"Then are there no brave Republican generals to replace them?" I snapped, as I decided to take myself off.

That portion of his crafty argument, which had no effect on me, had a good deal on the minds of many other people.

Moreover he had thought of a stratagem.

At one of the sittings at which the Council of Ministers was circling round the subject without yet daring to proceed to the fatal vote, M. Chaumets asked leave to make a suggestion.

Oh! He made it very timidly, so that it should have a better chance of slipping in between the two camps. He readily admitted England's reluctance to release France from the ban on a separate negotiation, but there was a middle course. England would not object if France, in the present difficult circumstances, asked Germany what her conditions of peace would be, all liberty of acceptance or refusal being retained.

"Do you imagine," observed someone, "that when you have undertaken this step you will be able to call a halt?"

"Do you also think that the peace conditions could be, as you suppose, acceptable?"

"And do you not think that the enemy's probable answer will be: 'We have not yet got as far as a peace, we are only at the stage of an armistice. Lay down your arms first unconditionally!'"

That was common sense, logic, truth; but those are things that frighten weaklings. They prefer to put them provisionally aside, to close their eyes and stop their ears.

Chaumets' suggestion elicited admiring comments.

"That's an idea," said one.

"An idea to go into thoroughly," agreed another.

"The Prime Minister might broach the subject to Mr. Winston Churchill," concluded a third.

"The Minister for Foreign Affairs might sound the Ambassador on the subject," insisted a fourth.

"It's urgent," said General Weygand impatiently. His voice was less harsh than at Tours, and his face more worn, with dark rings about the eyes. Was he already feeling remorse? No—not yet.

Neither at Cabinet meetings nor in private conversations did M. Mandel relax his intense activity. He secured the support of M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot, who tried to hinder the perfidious influence Chautemps was endeavouring to exert on the Radical ministers Queuille, Delbos, Chichery, etc.

Queuille was only of the stuff of which peace-time ministers are made, but he had the backbone of a sturdy son of the Corrèze. He would not be active, but he would not allow his faith to be shaken. Delbos was more rugged and loud-spoken, save in the last hours when his friends had to prevent him giving way; Chichery, in a classic phrase, is one of those "simpletons of the party," who are the prey of the artful. He was one of the first to be enrolled by Chautemps.

Léon Blum, who had been warned by Mandel, would try his utmost, aided by Dormoy, to snatch the Socialist Ministers from the circle being drawn round them by Paul Faure, Laval, Marquet and Chautemps. Monnet would not deviate from the straight path; Sérol, hesitant and almost won over by Chautemps' insinuating graces, would recover himself under the vehement adjurations of Léon Blum, but now and henceforth, despite Herriot's efforts, Rivière, Février and various illustrious nonentities bleated peace at anyone they came across.

I met Léon Blum in the lounge of the Royal Gascony Hotel. Distress had made his cheeks pale and hollow. There were restrained tears behind the glasses and a sob choked his voice. Scarcely had we exchanged a sorrowful handshake—it would be our last—than by some trick of memory there came back to my mind the verse which

he had whispered to me one May afternoon, at the moment when we were returning to the Palace of Versailles on the day when Aristide Briand was not elected President of the Republic: "*On ne saurait rêver comment il a vécu*" (*His life is beyond our dreams*).

Had we ever dreamed what we should live through, what we were going to live through?

Paul Reynaud passed through alternate moods of courage and depression. De Gaulle had gone to London in order to study the possibilities of transporting available troops to Africa. But before getting into the plane he pointed out to the Head of the Government all the reasons for not despairing and the importance of resisting the evil influences which sought to envelop him. His duty lay in Algiers or London. This was what, in a different tone and with similar arguments, Mandel repeated to the Premier each time he saw him. Both of their own accord, and also at the request of M. Mandel, M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot assured M. Reynaud of their full support; but Hélène de Portes was goading him in a different direction; Baudouin was more discreet about it, but no less insistent; while the entourage—that notorious entourage—was almost unanimous in sapping the soil beneath the feet of the Premier by way of preparation for the fall into the abyss.

Yes! Hélène de Portes might well flatter herself that she had paved the way skilfully when she brought about the departure of Paul Reynaud's old associate, Palewski, and when, some time later, she insisted on the dismissal of Alexis Léger from the post of Secretary-General at the Foreign Office. On the previous February 20th, when M. Palewski, mercilessly attacked by her, made up his mind to go back to the army, she exclaimed: "At last! For three years I've been wanting to get rid of him!"

M. Palewski had the bluntness of speech that devotion confers.

In those historic days, when the fate of the country depended on Paul Reynaud, M. Palewski would certainly

not have given the same advice as Hélène de Portes. He would have given the same as General de Gaulle. As for Alexis Léger, he would not have failed to be the advocate of honour, of the Alliance and of the Empire.

In this unparalleled period there was one man who fulfilled a difficult, grievous and burdensome mission with an incomparable mixture of dignity, restraint, tact and patience. This was the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Campbell.

The war had already been in progress about three months when he was called upon to replace Sir Eric Phipps. He was transferred from Belgrade, but he knew Paris well, having previously been *chargé d'affaires* there for several years. Reserved, discreet and aloof, he was admirably representative of the solid character of his country. Of him, as of many of his compatriots, it could be truthfully said that, once his teeth had sunk home, they would not relax their grip. But he was something more than tenacious and firm. To precision of language he added that delicacy of perception which understands, discriminates and divines. When anyone tried to dazzle his clearness of vision by some clumsy subterfuge, he was far too much of a diplomat to complain, but with a faintly sardonic smile allowed his lips to suggest the lesson which does not wound. Just as he could be confiding, but with prudence, to one who deserved such confidence, so by his coolness and his steady glance he could confuse the person who sought to deceive him.

He would not easily be duped. In fact, he would not be duped at all. Anyone who imagined he had succeeded in doing so had to pay for his own presumption. For his part, he had no reason to hide where his duty lay; he had no ulterior motives. He was not given to over-indulgence in long sentences, but the man to whom he talked could not pretend not to understand, so plainly did he express his meaning. Each word was carefully weighed, and it was invariably the right word for the occasion.

Until May 16th his task was comparatively simple. The Alliance did not involve too arduous duties, and the difficulties inherent in a state of war cast no shadows over a proved friendship.

I am sure that M. Daladier's memory of Sir Ronald Campbell is of a partner with whom he delighted to work and come to agreement.

I think that Sir Ronald's precision of mind must have been pleasing to M. Paul Reynaud.

I should be less ready to swear that Mme. Hélène de Portes was fond of him. No ! She did not like Sir Ronald Campbell, because she did not like Britain ; she did not like Britain because M. Baudouin did not like it either, and because Britain meant the *Alliance* with obligations which she was anxious to have broken.

Until the departure for Tours she did not express her feelings publicly. At Tours she began to shake off restraint. At Bordeaux she went beyond all bounds.

For a long time past, but especially since M. Reynaud had become Prime Minister, she had been boasting that she was something more than an inspirer. She flattered herself that the granting or refusing of audiences and of appointments to posts depended upon her, and that it was her privilege to take away, read, and pronounce judgment on reports. I like to imagine, out of respect to M. Paul Reynaud, who did not deserve such high-handed treatment, that she was exaggerating a little, but it was obvious that at Bordeaux nothing any longer held her back.

Shall I inform Sir Ronald Campbell, or did he himself notice, that, if a door opened a trifle sometimes during the numerous interviews he had to have with M. Paul Reynaud on June 14th, 15th and 16th, it was more often Hélène de Portes who was to be seen there than an official or an usher ? *Mme. la Présidente* must have thought that this clean-shaven Briton with the determined jaw and piercing eye, whose easy dignity she found intimidating, was staying too long and was going to annul the influence

she had exercised. She watched eagerly for his departure in order to offset at once the influence of the Ambassador and to minimise the scope of what he had imparted in the name of Mr. Winston Churchill or Lord Halifax.

One day, perhaps, we shall know from a Blue Book or a report all the details of Sir Ronald Campbell's conversations and diplomatic exchanges during his term of office as Ambassador to France. I am sure that they will reveal in him a great Ambassador, a great Englishman, and a great friend of France.

He must have suffered much at Bordeaux, where the defeatist cabal around the Premier, in the Foreign Office and among the politicians had given up troubling to conceal their hostility to Britain. They even went to the length of rudeness and boorish jest. They had thought fit to give the Ambassador as his residence a château thirty miles from Bordeaux in which there was not even a telephone. It was scarcely possible to be more graceless in the treatment of a man forced by circumstances to go to and fro continually between the Prime Minister's house, the Foreign Ministry and his own place of residence. M. Mandel, duly apprised, quickly put matters right.

The fifteenth of June came to an end without a solution being reached. But there was no denying that the "capitulationists" had gained ground.

Camille Chautemps' stratagem had produced its effect. Reynaud was more and more closely ringed round and the Marshal ever more constantly badgered to make an end. M. Mandel, certainly, had turned the arguments of his colleague against him. He had boldly taken the offensive by renewing his suggestion of the previous day. The Commander-in-Chief might capitulate, but not the Government. The latter had only one duty—not to give up the struggle.

If the Government could not continue it in France it must hold fast to the pledge it had taken in the message to Roosevelt :



*"We will shut ourselves up in one of our provinces, and, if we are driven out, we will go to North Africa, or, if necessary, to our possessions in America."*

Some of the Ministers sneered derisively to hear him. They were already confident of being in the majority. The clever ones assumed a benign air. They protested their good intentions towards Britain. They swore on their consciences that they did not wish to renounce their signatures, but that if the British Government consented to release them, they would not go beyond a plain statement of the conditions of peace. If these should prove contrary to their honour they would, of course, spurn them and set off for North Africa.

Already, however, the Marshal was saying plainly that he himself would never leave purely French soil. There was no resisting that, and nothing for it but to accept the decision. M. Prouvost, introduced as Minister of Information by M. Paul Reynaud, as part of the changes on June 6th designed to strengthen the Cabinet in the direction of war to the finish, meekly took his stand behind Pétain. Was it because, like other newspaper proprietors who are industrialists first and foremost, he was influenced by the prospect of the cessation of his commercial enterprises, whereas if an armistice was requested they might continue and become prosperous or nearly normal again?

M. Mandel pierced with his barbed shafts those men who, having been appointed Ministers in order to make war, now went down on their knees to beg for peace. He told them that frightful conditions would be imposed on them, and that they would dishonour themselves for nothing.

M. Paul Reynaud himself, who had just told a foreign diplomat that the departure for Africa was virtually decided upon, nevertheless lent himself to M. Chautemps' suggestion, and agreed to submit it to the British Government.

Such, among other things, was one of the agreeable

communications that Sir Ronald Campbell received and had to forward to London.

The news which spread among a few groups during this night, which seemed as lugubrious as a wake, disquieted some and delighted others.

"Thirteen votes in favour of capitulation and nine against," predicted a man who was skilled at estimating ballots. "That is, unless——"

What did he mean by "unless" ?

M. Albert Lebrun might recollect that he was Head of the State and say : " I will not have my name dishonoured ! I am going to send a message to the country."

M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot might block the path, and say to the conspirators :

" You have no right to commit this crime against the country without the authorisation of Parliament. Convoke both Houses at once, If you don't, we resign and appeal to the nation ! "

Instead of lending himself to these interminable discussions in everlasting Cabinet meetings, instead of arguing and lecturing, M. Paul Reynaud, the Prime Minister, might throw into one last debate the weight of his authority as Head of the Government and dictate the law of honour :

" I am Head of the Government. I agree with the Speakers of the Senate and the Chamber. Gentlemen, I beg you to hand me your resignations."

And what then ? Why, group a few determined individuals into a fresh Government of restricted numbers, appoint a new Generalissimo to organise a real resistance, during which, if they did not manage to turn one of the provinces into a fortress, they could at least renew the miracle of Dunkirk and evacuate to North Africa and England hundreds of thousands of men who, after a period of rest and reorganisation, would become the future shock troops for a triumphal return.

But all this was not a matter of reading a speech or launching a slogan : it was a matter of will and action.

## 376      Truth on the Tragedy of France

If will and action were not forthcoming, are we to conclude, as some have asserted, that Paul Reynaud's much-vaunted resolve to fight to a finish had been, since the end of May, nothing but a mask?

I will not insult him by believing so. But we shall see how, in the words of that French literary genius whose eagle glance pierced deeper into the heart of man than of anyone else: "Weakness has no need of aid to help her fall."

## Chapter XXXI

### The Tragedy Reaches Its End

A MOURNFUL DAY—MARSHAL PÉTAİN DECIDES TO PRECIPITATE SURRENDER—MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL'S SENSATIONAL PROPOSAL OF UNION BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE—GENERAL DE GAULLE TELEPHONES TO M. PAUL REYNAUD FROM LONDON—AN EVENING OF CONFUSION—THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS VOTES IN FAVOUR OF CAPITULATION—M. PAUL REYNAUD RESIGNS—MARSHAL PÉTAİN FORMS THE NEW GOVERNMENT

THE tragedy is approaching its end. The vicissitudes knitting it together have brought it step by step to its culminating point. Words, attitudes, and actions have revealed the characters of the various players, whether they fill a leading rôle or a secondary part.

Almost all the essential types of humanity have figured in it, with their nobility and weakness, their grandeur and decadence, their virtues and their blemishes, their ambitions and their pettiness, their motives, which range from the loftiest to the most vile ; masters and servants, traitors of every variety, great intriguers and trivial schemers, mediocrities of every kind, and, to complete the cast, the woman who brings disaster. Will the leaders be unequal to their high destiny, the heroes powerless? Will the conspirators, favoured by treachery and aided by intrigue, renounce the completion of their hateful crime?

The spectators are breathless in anticipation of the climax, which can be delayed no longer. The personage about whom the whole action revolves has not yet come

to the edge of the stage, but she is at once invisible and present. It is in her name that all speak and act, or claim to act. Shall this queen—for such she is?—be despoiled, besmirched, done to death? Or, already all but lifeless, will she be snatched to safety from the hands of her executioners? Never did Æschylus, Shakespeare or Corneille construct in their imaginations a tragedy so cruelly heart-rending as that in which my country, magnificent and wretched, lay at the point of death.

The crowd whose mass encumbered the streets and squares about the Prefecture at Bordeaux did duty for the Greek chorus of old. But the dull murmur rising from it towards the heavens was more plaintive than noisy; party passions had not abdicated, but, as though ashamed at the sound of their own voices, whispered rather than spoke aloud.

A deathly anguish hovered over the throng: the lugubrious solemnity of events had invaded the spirits of all. As they walked they looked like automata, whether their meditations bowed their heads and fixed their gaze upon the ground, or whether with their eyes raised towards the sky, they seemed to search there for a star.

*"Where nothing, but who knows nothing, is once seen to smile."*

Never, perhaps, was Shakespeare's line more true.

When I think of that morning and of this sixteenth of November, though some months have gone by, I feel the same shudder that chilled my temples.

Within the shadow of the Ministries events were proceeding along their inevitable road.

In any other atmosphere, what was known of Mr. Roosevelt's reply to M. Paul Reynaud's message would have been considered, if not as a pledge, at least as an advantage. It did not bring what Mr. Roosevelt could not give—a declaration of war on Germany by the United States—but it was a powerful source of comfort, an encouragement, a promise, while its inner substance was

more forceful than the words. It ought to have been an element of hope ; it ought to have galvanised the energy of the French Government, had not M. Paul Reynaud allowed himself to be trapped by the compilers of his message, and had he not to some extent tied himself down as far as his Cabinet was concerned by acknowledging that his appeal to Mr. Roosevelt was his last cartridge.

So those about him had a fine chance to draw this conclusion : " You have no cause to reproach yourself. You have exhausted every possibility. Your conscience can rest easy ; there is nothing left but to surrender."

Influenced, intimidated, M. Paul Reynaud did not make the most of the causes for confidence given him from across the Atlantic, and he informed Mr. Winston Churchill that Mr. Roosevelt's reply was not satisfactory, and demanded France's release from the obligations fixed by the declaration of March 28th.

Marshal Pétain, for his part, having been sufficiently plagued and badgered by M. Laval or one of his emissaries, by M. Baudouin, by General Weygand, and perhaps by M. Georges Bonnet, who had come to the rescue, decided to precipitate the decision at the afternoon meeting of the Council. He would be Head of the Government that evening. M. Lebrun was agreeable. He, too, would take the Marshal as *cover*. It would not cover him for very long.

The Marshal who, henceforward, was determined on an armistice, had the Spanish Ambassador sounded to see whether the Government of Madrid would undertake to transmit the French request to the German and Italian Governments.

Señor Lequeriqua would not fail to tender his good offices to the Government of Marshal Pétain in accordance with international custom, but with an especial courtesy of his own.

The same morning the British Cabinet met and considered M. Reynaud's message and some dispatches from Sir Ronald Campbell.

Let us refer to the speech made by Mr. Winston Churchill

in the Commons on June 25th, and particularly to the passage in which he summarised the reply he had sent to M. Paul Reynaud through Sir Ronald Campbell.

*"On the sixteenth I received a message from M. Reynaud, who had then moved to Bordeaux, to say that the American response was not satisfactory, and requesting the formal release for France from her obligations under the Anglo-French agreement. The Cabinet was immediately convened, and we sent a message of which I do not give the exact text, but I give the general substance.*

*"Separate negotiations, whether for armistice or peace depend upon an agreement made with the French Republic and not with any particular French administration or statesman. They, therefore, involved the honour of France. However—and this was in view of what one saw of all they had suffered and of what were the forces evidently working upon them—provided that the French Fleet was despatched to British ports and remained there while the negotiations were conducted, His Majesty's Government would give their consent to the French Government asking what terms of armistice would be open to them. It was also made clear that His Majesty's Government were resolved to continue the war, and altogether cut themselves out of any association with such inquiries about an armistice.*

*"The same evening, the sixteenth, when I was preparing at M. Reynaud's invitation to go and see him, and I was in fact in the train, I received the news that he had been overthrown and that a new Government under Marshal Pétain had been formed, which Government had been formed for the prime purpose of seeking an armistice with Germany.*

*"In these circumstances we, naturally, did everything in our power to secure proper arrangements for the disposition of the French Fleet."*

This was not all. Here is the essential matter. The Prime Minister had a long conference with General de Gaulle, who had been sent over on a mission by M. Paul Reynaud.

With him and some of his colleagues he sought a formula which might save France and the Alliance. They found it. The Premier submitted it to the Cabinet, at which meeting a foreign Ambassador was present, for perhaps the first time, in the person of M. Corbin. Mr. Winston Churchill, indeed, was anxious to make it abundantly clear that the offer which was to be made to France was not put forward with any underlying idea of belittling her, but: "With the object of assisting France and supporting her to the utmost in the hours of stress through which she is passing, and also in the hope of encouraging the French Government to continue its resistance."

This document I want to reproduce in full :

At this most fateful moment in the history of the modern world, the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the French Republic make this declaration of indissoluble union and unyielding resolution in their common defence of justice and freedom against subjection to a system which reduces mankind to a life of robots and slaves.

"The two Governments declare that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations, but one Franco-British union. The constitution of the union will provide for joint organs of defence, foreign, financial, and economic policies.

"Every citizen of France will enjoy immediately citizenship of Great Britain. Every British subject will become a citizen of France.

"Both countries will share responsibility for the repair of the devastation of war wherever it occurs in their territories, and the resources of both shall be equally and as one applied to that purpose.

"During the War there shall be a single War Cabinet, and all the forces of Britain and France, whether on land, sea or in the air, will be placed under its direction. It will govern from wherever it best can. The two Parliaments will be formally associated.

"The nations of the British Empire are already forming



new armies. France will keep her available forces in the field, on the sea, and in the air.

"The union appeals to the United States to fortify the economic resources of the Allies and to bring her powerful material aid to the common cause.

"The union will concentrate its full energy against the power of the enemy, no matter where the battle may be. And thus we shall conquer."

Never, perhaps, in history has a like effort at union between two peoples been attempted. With a grandiose vision of their common interests, Mr. Winston Churchill soared in a magnificent emotional and intellectual flight above prejudices, paltriness and particularism, and traced the path to the great associations of nations which alone could authorise the hope of a future League of Nations.

Time was pressing. Armed with this precious document, General de Gaulle telephoned to M. Paul Reynaud.

The French Premier was greatly dejected. When the call came through he was having an interview with Sir Ronald Campbell who, a few minutes later, would himself receive the official text and hand it over to M. Reynaud, not failing as he did so to comment upon it with all the moderation and clearness of speech habitual to him.

General de Gaulle read to the Premier the text of the proposed union adopted by the British Cabinet. He enlarged upon the reasons which had led the British Prime Minister to take such a step. He stressed the exceptional, the unique, value of the pledge taken by the British Government for the present and for the future. Gradually hope revived in M. Paul Reynaud's careworn face. He would go at once to the Council, where this dramatic turn of events was certainly not expected. For a few moments he regained so much confidence that he sent a request to Mr. Winston Churchill, asking him to come to Bordeaux as soon as possible.

Rumours went round which were soon different from one another, but not contradictory: "Churchill is coming."

"Reynaud is going to see Churchill at St. Nazaire."

A light came down from heaven? No! It was vain.

Did M. Reynaud fail to make clear to the council the inestimable worth of the British Government's proposal? Or was he influenced by the reaction of the enemies of Britain, who whispered to Marshal Pétain this absurd interpretation:

"They want to make France a Dominion!"

Was he too much harassed, exhausted, and worn by the incessant struggle in which he had been engaged for months against events, against his colleagues, and against those about him?

Anyway, the incredible happened.

These fine Ministers virtually did not discuss a document which deserved either to be accepted with acclamation or to be examined in minute detail. No! There was nothing of either.

"That's enough! We must make an end of it," said the Marshal. The vote was taken. Thirteen against nine, as had been prophesied to me the day before, or else fourteen against ten, according to the news which from 10 p.m. onwards went from mouth to mouth.

As I was making my way to a restaurant with a friend of mine about half-past eight in the evening, a car came round the corner, forcing me to stop short in order to avoid being run over. I looked up. Whom did I see? Hélène de Portes, her face triumphant.

That's what the ancients would have called an omen. I said to myself: "She looks confident. That's bad for France."

At the restaurant, close beside our table, I saw the cheerful face of a man who was amusing his guests—M. Pomaret!

M. Pomaret, the man who doted on kicks administered to the base of the spine, M. Pomaret, radiant! A bad sign. A friend came up to me. "It must be all up," he said. "Some members of the British colony have been informed that they must register at the Consulate for departure."

I ran to the Prefecture. Something was different. Strange door-keepers barred the entrance, roughly demanded identity papers, flashed electric torches into faces, and asked questions rudely.

"Mandel!" they said. "Your Mandel isn't a Minister any longer."

These men who had taken up their position before the Prefecture were the myrmidons of M. Marquet, the Mayor of Bordeaux. M. Marquet was in a fair way to being appointed Minister of the Interior, and he was taking precautions to forestall a wholly imaginary resort to violence on the part of M. Mandel.

I forced the barrage. A mob difficult to negotiate filled the halls and ante-rooms on the first floor. Voices shouted names and news from group to group as in the hurly-burly of peace-time crises. A lot they cared about France! All they cared about was knowing who would be Ministers.

*"To be or not to be—a Minister!"* Misery! That, oh my France, was the disease of which you were dying!

Some indications of what had been arranged were bandied about at random.

"Pétain, President. Laval, Minister for Foreign Affairs."

"No! Baudouin's keeping the Quai d'Orsay."

"No, he's not. I've seen Laval. He was confident of getting the Foreign Office."

"Well, he won't. Pétain had promised it to Baudouin."

"Is Baudouin staying even though Reynaud's gone?"

"Where have you sprung from to be so much behind the times? Baudouin voted against Reynaud."

"What about Laval?"

"Minister of Justice and Vice-Premier."

"So Chautemps is out of it?"

"No, no! He'll stay, but I don't know where. They'll find a place for him. He's deserved it!"

A young man went by and said: "Weygand, Minister of War; Darlan, Minister of Marine."

"Darlan?" said the innocent. "Impossible!"

His neighbour bellowed in his ear:

"Impossible! Have you ever seen anyone refuse to be a Minister? Rather than not be, they would all go and look for their portfolios in the gutter. A portfolio, my friend, take it from an old hand like me, is never dirty. Why, ask Pomaret, who remains Minister of Labour, or Marquet, who becomes Minister of the Interior, and whose first concern, as soon as it's official, will be to have his old enemy Mandel arrested. Didn't you see his 'retainers' at the door?"

By dint of shoving with my elbows I at last reached M. Mandel's room, where some friends were assembled and others were passing through to congratulate him on the desperate struggle he had made.

But that was already ancient history. It was the morrow that counted now. What would the new Ministry do?

It had been set up to ask the enemy what his peace terms would be.

"If *they* imagine that they'll be mild," declared someone, "*they're* deluding themselves."

"The terms will be so severe that the Government will necessarily collapse," declared M. Mandel.

"My dear Minister," I said, "I don't share the relative confidence of which you give them the benefit. They are caught in the toils. They couldn't get out if they wanted to. But they don't even want to."

"When they have put their signature to ignominious clauses, then perhaps there will be a violent reaction of outraged patriotism, and they may be afraid of public opinion."

"I don't think so. Probably the Germans won't give them the opportunity. They will put off dictating peace terms until the end of the war with Britain, and will give them two hours in which to accept the armistice conditions."

## 386 Truth on the Tragedy of France

"It's possible. We shall have two or three days to see what's going to happen."

I was assured, though a long while after June 16th, that M. Paul Reynaud had expressed the same views as M. Mandel.

"It was," one of his personal friends insisted to me, "by dazzling him with the prospect of a triumphant revival of resistance that they succeeded in getting round him."

I was not able to form my opinion of M. Paul Reynaud's moral and physical condition on the evening of June 16th from the evidence of my own eyes. But the description of it given to me that day was in conformity with the opinion subsequently expressed to me by General de Gaulle himself, namely that the Prime Minister, his nerves completely frayed, his powers of resistance broken, had probably regarded the decision to surrender as a deliverance, the same deliverance as that of the soldier who wounded, drained of strength, half dead, throws himself down on the bank to fall asleep—or to die.

As I left the Prefecture the streets presented the same disturbed aspect as when I arrived, with odd-looking people walking along by the walls and staring curiously at the passers-by—very much in the way they do when the police are making investigations on the evening of a murder or a rowdy strike.

A friend went with me as far as the Monré Hotel, where the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Campbell, worked all night with Mr. Oliver Harvey and his staff.

At the end of this frightful day and at the beginning of the next, which could scarcely be much better, amid the catastrophe surrounding us all, I imagine that, like Othello when he believed in the falseness of Desdemona, we might have cried:

*"Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon; and that the affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration."*

## The Tragedy Reaches Its End 387

My companion and I scarcely dared open our mouths. So heavy with misfortune was the air that the sound of our voices frightened us.

The curtain had fallen on the tragedy. Treachery had won.

The victim, France, would be handed over to the executioners to be buried alive in the mire of shame.

"Do you really think," I murmured, "that we ought ever to see the sun again?"

## Chapter XXXII

### Farewell !

M. POMARET'S GLORY—INDECENT JOY—AN INJUSTICE TOWARDS M. GEORGES BONNET—A LAST CONVERSATION WITH GEORGES MANDEL—MY REASONS FOR LEAVING FRANCE—M. BAUDOUIN REASSURES THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR ABOUT THE FATE OF THE FRENCH FLEET—THE REQUEST FOR AN ARMISTICE IS SENT—MARSHAL PÉTAIN ANNOUNCES THE CAPITULATION OVER THE WIRELESS—GENERAL DEBENEY'S MEMORIES—THE BAND PLAYS THE MARSEILLAISE : " THE DAY OF GLORY "—ARREST OF M. MANDEL—MARSHAL PÉTAIN APOLOGISES TO HIM—FAREWELL, MANDEL ! FAREWELL, MY COUNTRY—DEPARTURE

JUNE 17TH.—Marshal Pétain's Government is finally constituted. M. Laval and M. Marquet are no longer in it. M. Laval insisted on the Foreign Office. M. Baudouin claimed it. He had been promised it, and thoroughly deserved it on the strength of what he had already done and wanted to do. M. Laval slammed the door behind him and took his friend Marquet with him. They would not be long in coming back, the former at least stronger and more exacting. M. Pomaret gained thereby an unexpected promotion, a pledge, he hoped, of still loftier heights. But it would only be provisional. He became Minister of the Interior, and puffed himself up, repeating boastfully : " I have often been in Germany. I was very well received by Goering and Goebbels ! Now we must certainly have people in the Government who know them." The poor man imagined that that was a qualification. But now Messrs. Goering and Goebbels do not care whether they have lunched and dined with their slaves and danced

with their wives. They have no need of convivial recollections to whistle up their servants.

The elements seemed to have put themselves in harmony with events. A deluge of rain scattered the groups. The Spanish and Portuguese Consulates, the passport offices were overrun, for many were those who, for various reasons, wanted to leave France. The British Consulate arranged for the evacuation of its nationals. The Embassy staff would await the signing of the armistice. Hotel lounges were transformed into clubs. Men's faces gave the clue to their souls. The concentrated sadness of some contrasted with the barely restrained joy of others. Certain Ministers with their wives and their associates were particularly indecent. There was much stirring and strutting in those quarters, as if a great victory had just been won. How unjust I am ! Of course, it was a victory, since it was theirs. You say it was not a victory for unhappy France ? What kind of a joke is that ? Should not France be happy, seeing that they were ? Besides, what is France, if it is not they ? And nothing but they ! They showed that very clearly to those to whom they thought they could do so without doing any harm ! It is at such times that the meanness of base souls comes to the surface. Saint-Simon, if I remember aright, relates that Villeroy, speaking as the expert courtier he was, used to say : " When a Minister comes into favour, hand him the chamber-pot. When he is about to fall, empty it over his head."

There were many Villeroyes in Bordeaux on June 16th and 17th last ; some less than Villeroyes, too ; and, if it comes to that, some pale shadows of Villeroyes as well.

I could tell some tales, mention names, burn the traitor's brand on faces, even on women's faces and the faces of friends. All those in whom fear had dwelt for months at last held their heads up and permitted themselves to look contemptuously at the men supposedly responsible for the war, new suspects of whom it was intended to make scapegoats. All those, too, who, the day before,



had been trembling for their castles and their money bags breathed freely. "The Germans would not take everything from us," they dared to say; "whilst this 'cursed war' would have ruined us completely."

Their names? What is the good? All the defeatists, great and small, all the "strong party"—you remember M. Georges Bonnet's description of them to Mr. Sumner Welles—they were all there. Had they not been there yesterday and the day before, and earlier still? Of course they had! But then the shadows were more favourable to their health and to their intrigues. Now they show themselves and throw out their chests. In a few hours' time they won't suffer anyone but themselves and their set to walk in the middle of the pavement.

M. Georges Bonnet himself was there. He put forth all his energy without cessation—but not without acrimony, for he had been the victim of an injustice: he was not a Minister. He was not satisfied—and with reason. He had a right to be in that Government. He could have capitulated just as well as Pétain or Baudouin or anybody else. Perhaps even better, after all! Poor Georges! Another opportunity lost through having played on both boards too long. He, a hunter, had forgotten the proverb: "You must not course two hares at once."

It's certainly very clever to prepare two different files.

First.—The file which proves that one is anti-British and pro-Italian, and that if only people had listened to you the war would have been avoided, etc. etc.

Second.—The file which proves that one's attitude has been most correct, pro-British, uncompromising about France's duty, and that Ribbentrop's reproaches are a tissue of lies, etc. etc.

Yes. That's very nice and very clever, but short of incredible luck, one misses both hares.

The sights I witnessed, without lingering over them, would have confirmed me, had my courage failed me in the least, in the unshakable resolve that I had formed

during the night of June 12th-13th, namely, to choose exile in preference to the tiniest share in the crime and in the capitulation.

The hour was striking for me to be faithful to the cause I had defended and the resolve I had made. I claim no merit for condemning myself to it and for putting my decision into effect, but I will not hide the grief that it caused me and which I still feel.

Before leaving I went to say good-bye to the man who during these ten months of war had never ceased to be a Frenchman pure and without blemish, as well as a far-sighted and intrepid Statesman. Of all French politicians, he was the one who, as can easily be realised from one narrative after another, possessed the spirit of war in the highest degree. In this frightful turmoil, he alone had been clear, definite, upright and always bent on the single aim of winning the war ; he had been the only minister never to lose his unfailing coolness. During the days and nights whose hours of anguish have just been described and painfully relived, he neither failed nor faltered at any time. He had been the vigilant supporter of M. Paul Reynaud. More than once, indeed, he had carried him, as it were, by the strength of his own arms ; he had roused, warned, encouraged, advised, stirred, and recalled him to reason and duty. He had stood up to Weygand, tried to undeceive the Marshal, frequently thwarted Baudouin, and put a spoke in Chautemps' wheel. To those who forgot it he recalled the existence of a French Empire—at Algiers and Tunis, in Morocco, in the heart of Africa, at Hanoi, Saigon, and in Syria—an Empire scattered about the globe, flanking that of a Britain which, even were she left alone, would not bow the knee, but would concentrate all the forces of the British Empire to withstand the scourge.

To the faint-hearted he used to say : " You imagine that by capitulating you will sleep in peace and pick up the routine of an easy, comfortable life. But the war will continue over your heads, since the German and the Italian

will make use of our ports, factories and territory against Britain. Whatever you may do or wish, the war will begin again one day on our soil. By surrendering, you fancy you will win rest and quiet. Instead, you will only reap the contempt of the world and ultimately of yourselves."

Mandel and I were so completely at one, and had been for such a long time, that there was no need for lengthy explanations between us. I told him that I was going to leave the country. Stay in France? I should no longer be able to fight against Germany and Hitlerism and all that it represented. I should no longer be able to defend that loyalty to an alliance of which I had been the protagonist. I should have no platform from which to make my voice heard. That very morning the *Petit Parisien* had lain down at the feet of Pétain, and I knew, on the proprietor's own confession, that the paper would find even a bare neutrality towards Germany almost impossible. With the British I should at least be able to share their troubles and their fight.

Georges Mandel would have liked me to wait a few days. He cherished the illusion—it was his only mistake—that the new Government could not endure in the face of what the enormity of the German conditions was likely to be. He had expressed this belief to me during the preceding night, and he reiterated it in this, our last private conversation. Some hours later an incident was to strengthen his opinion. I did not share it, but hoped it might be correct, and that another Government, taking with it the fleet and the air force, might lead the French Empire along the road of resistance to the uttermost.

"If you're not mistaken," I said, "I'll join you, wherever you are." And with that we exchanged an affectionate farewell.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the first morning M. Baudouin was hard at it. In London, Mr. Winston Churchill was faced with a new, but not altogether unexpected, situation. On the evening

of June 16th he was in the train and about to set out for the aerodrome, from where he was to have flown in answer to M. Reynaud's appeal, when he was informed of the French Premier's sudden resignation. But if M. Reynaud had disappeared, the problem for the British Government remained the same: if the armistice asked for by the French Government were concluded, what would become of the French fleet?

"In these circumstances," Mr. Winston Churchill said later, in his historic speech in the House of Commons on June 25th, "we naturally did everything in our power to secure proper arrangements for the disposition of the French fleet."

M. Baudouin gave Sir Ronald Campbell all the assurances that can be found crammed into a rogue's knapsack. Great Britain need have no misgivings. Germany and Italy would never be able to make use of so much as a French fishing-boat. Darlan would vouch for that! Until the last moment, until the last second, the second when the Marshal's plenipotentiaries were putting their signatures to a humiliating capitulation, M. Baudouin continued to declare not only to the British Ambassador, but to many other foreign representatives, notably to M. Zaleski, the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the Pétain Cabinet was a continuation of the Reynaud Cabinet, and that if Hitler's conditions were not acceptable, the French Government would embark for North Africa.

He did not mean a single word of it, but he intended to lull the vigilance of the men to whom he was speaking, and abruptly confront them with the accomplished fact. He said all this again later to Lord Lloyd, head of the Colonial Office, and to Mr. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, who were sent to Bordeaux on June 19th to make contact with the new French Ministers. The more he lied, the more he looked as though he were telling the truth. Indeed, so much fervour did he put into his lying that at times people were taken in. The worst

instance of his mendacity was when he carried his impudence so far as to say over the radio :

"We are ready to lay down our arms if we can get an honourable peace, but we are never ready to accept shameful conditions which would mean the end of spiritual freedom for our people."

What a sinister comedy ! What appalling hypocrisy ! The French Government had begged to be released from its undertaking not to conclude separate negotiations with the enemy, giving as its reason that it was not in a fit state to continue the struggle. And here was M. Baudouin bragging : " If the conditions are shameful we will continue the struggle ! "

Did he think to deceive the Germans ? Assuredly not ! The British ? No, not even them. But the unfortunate French people, who understood nothing of what was happening—yes !

Let us go back a little. The Minister for Foreign Affairs asked Señor Lequeriqua to call on him. This appeal, as soon as it was known at the Spanish Embassy, indicated that the request for an armistice would reach Berlin and Rome through the instrumentality of the Spanish Government, if, indeed, it had not already done so, for it was in the middle of the night that Señor Lequeriqua's presence had been requested.

Marshal Pétain insisted on making the announcement himself in a broadcast speech. How sad it was to hear this voice, which had been that of the desperate resistance of Verdun, " to the death," now lamenting the capitulation and pleading for the abdication with words of honour devoid of sense, seeing the meaning which was wrapped up in them. Then to hear him saying, "*The fight must cease !*" and imagining himself quit of responsibility because he presented his person to his country ! The pity of it ! What could be done with his person, considering that it brought downfall with it !

Hardly had he said "*The fight must cease !*" when he added :

" I appealed last night to the adversary in order to ask him whether he is ready to discuss with me, as between soldiers and in honour, the means to end hostilities."

Re-read in the light of events, the words, " as between soldiers and in honour," make one shudder.

Illusion carried to this degree almost takes the form of a monstrosity. The wretched man revealed his total inability to understand either the men or the things that, to France's misfortune, base intrigue had called on him to face. " As between soldiers." What soldiers? He? Certainly. But what about the other? Hitler?

So he had learned nothing. Misery of hoodwinked senility! He spoke of honour. As if the enemy had any other concern than to rob France of everything and, first of all, of that!

And that man was the general of Verdun!

Oh! Verdun! Verdun! What would you think of it, you nameless heroes who with your breasts and then with your dead bodies piled one upon the other made a rampart which the Crown Prince could not demolish!

And what do you think of it, oh valiant General Debeney, who said to me—do you remember, it was on March 5th, when in a splendid spring setting we were admiring the vessel of Notre Dame at anchor in the Seine?—you said to me, I repeat:

" At the moment of the attack on Verdun I had been sent forward with my division, and we arrived on the day Fort Douaumont was taken. I was studying the plan of campaign with one of my comrades when an order of the day from Marshal Joffre was brought to me: ' Hold firm on the right bank of the Meuse at any price. Any leader who gives the order to retreat *will be court-martialled.*' "

" We looked at one another and exclaimed together: ' Well, we're for it, and no mistake! Come on!' We felt the force of command behind us. That was what we needed."

" We felt the force of command! " A great phrase and a damning indictment of Weygand!

Whilst Pétain was snivelling in front of the microphone I recalled how Debeney had said: "We felt the force of command behind us!" You told me something else that day as well, my friend. You praised Marshal Joffre, his character and his self-control, the full worth of which I only appreciated long after, and you added these words, which I remember every time I try to explain to myself General Weygand's failure: "During the war of 1914-18 we had the man that was needed at each period. If Foch had been in Joffre's place in 1914 there wouldn't be a France now. We should have been irrevocably beaten, because he would have forged ahead instead of retreating. On the other hand, in 1918 Joffre wouldn't have been as good as Foch, whose personal genius and skill in handling men proved decisive."

It was in March that you said that. May proved you only too sadly right. We had no Joffre.

And you, Painlevé, so grossly slandered, who, to defend yourself against grotesque accusations, had to write a book called "How I appointed Foch and Pétain," do you recognise your Generalissimo of 1917 in the man mumbling about defeat and surrender?

Pétain brought his lamentable proclamation to a close. Horror! What's that? They're playing the *Marseillaise* for him!

*"Allons enfants de la Patrie  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!"*

What baleful person was it who ordered it to be played? Pétain himself? Baudouin wallowing in the intoxication of his victory? Pomaret who was quite capable of it, or simply M. Prouvost, who was still something like a Commissary of Information. The *Marseillaise*! The day of glory! The *Marseillaise* when a *De Profundis* would be appropriate!

Compare the Marshal's lamentations with the few sentences addressed the next night by Mr. Winston Churchill

to all the peoples of the British Empire. In one case the naïve vanity of an expiring glory joined to the most pitiful of explanations ; in the other, energy straining every muscle to attain an immeasurable greatness, together with a grieved affection for the French people who " have fallen into this terrible misfortune."

Let us read and re-read these words, which of themselves, if there were not many more besides, would assure Winston Churchill a place in every proud heart :

*" The news from France is very bad, and I grieve for the gallant French people who have fallen into this terrible misfortune. Nothing will alter our feeling towards them or our faith that the genius of France will rise again.*

*" What has happened in France makes no difference to British faith and purpose.*

*" We have become the sole champions now in arms to defend the world cause. We shall do our best to be worthy of that high honour.*

*" We shall defend our island and, with the British Empire around us, we shall fight on unconquerable until the curse of Hitler is lifted from the brows of men. We are sure that in the end all will be well."*

Poor, poor Pétain !

It was a few minutes after the Marshal's sorry speech that the incident occurred, the end of which caused Georges Mandel to be misled.

The conspirators, who at times felt the ground quiver beneath their feet, were afraid, and under the influence of their fear they extorted from the Marshal an order for the arrest of the late Minister of the Interior. The circumstances in which it was carried out are known. The story of it was told some hours later by the ex-Minister, as though to myself ; but I am only preserving that part of it which adds a further touch to the picture of those ill-fated days. M. Mandel was having lunch at the restaurant of the *Chapon Fin*. He, like myself, had perhaps just heard the Marshal's depressing words, when an officer came up and



ordered him to follow him. I pass over the details of this public affront, of the several hours spent in waiting, of the protest made by M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot to the President of the Republic against this abuse of power.

But this is the essential point. The Marshal perceived that a foolish action had been suggested to him. He wanted to set it right. He pleaded a regrettable error, and told M. Mandel that he was free. But this over-simple manner of getting out of the blunder did not suit M. Mandel, who insisted on a public apology. The Marshal complied with his request and wrote two different versions before producing a text which satisfied M. Mandel's legitimate demands. In itself the incident was no more than lamentable. What is more important is the lesson given to the Marshal by the prisoner, who reproached the warrior of 1914-18 for allowing himself to be used like a puppet by people exploiting his name and prestige for their own ends, and at the expense of a France in mortal agony.

The Marshal put his head in his hands, not disguising his dismay. A veil was falling from before his eyes. M. Mandel could well believe that his few hours' arrest had been a fortunate happening, since it had allowed him to enlighten the new head of the Government. But the latter would be taken in hand again by the Mafia and his strength of brain would not be sufficient to resist.

I have shown how, by a gradual obsession, Marshal Pétain had been convinced that capitulation was not only inevitable, but necessary, for the saving of the lives of young Frenchmen and for the regeneration of France. The reader has likewise been able to see with what tenacious skill the Marshal's selfish flatterers had eventually succeeded in persuading him that he was of the stuff of which great statesmen are made. This degradation to which a great name was brought is one of the worst miseries to be noted in the misfortunes of my country.

Dear Mandel, you had won a victory for which you would be made to pay dearly. Were I writing of anyone else I

should have scruples about compromising you by paying you so much homage, but I know you are not one of those who repudiate their actions, their friends, and even their thoughts. There is no breaking the tempered steel of your will.

I was to learn later that in Morocco you compelled the admiration of the men who kept you under surveillance. I know that, confronting your judges, you will be less concerned to defend yourself than to indict their masters, the murderers of France.

When shall we meet again ? Shall we ever meet again ?

The British destroyer which was to take me to Le Verdon, where I should board a freighter bound for some British port, was moored by the Quai des Chartrons.

Beneath a downpour of rain the late-comers came hastening aboard : officials, merchants, nurses of the British colony with indispensable luggage snatched up at random in the haste of departure and thrown anyhow on the deck ; there was the traditional confusion and melancholy of embarkations with something inexpressible added, the feeling of a final rupture, of an end. Even in the ordinary circumstances of life, to depart is to some extent to die, if it be true that there is death in any parting. But this departure, without anything exciting to occupy the mind, was a frightful severance, a wrench never, perhaps, to be healed. Silent farewells were exchanged. The destroyer glided away and turned. My eye could make out nothing but a few points of light . . . and the vague mass of the town . . . and the shore . . . and my country slipping ever further away ; my country mutilated, bleeding, covered with mud. My heart grew heavy and heavier yet. It was as though a block of ice weighed upon my head. . . .

A hand gripped me and led me away, the hand of Noble Hall, of the British Embassy, a knight of the *entente cordiale* since the earliest days, one of those Britons who have a rare delicacy of feeling. He never told me, he never would tell me that he felt pity for my grief.

## Chapter XXXIII

### “ Consummatum Est ”

M. BAUDOUIN'S PROMISES—THE “ MASSILIA ” TRAP—  
THE BORDEAUX GOVERNMENT DOES NOT KEEP ITS  
PROMISES IN THE MATTER OF THE FRENCH FLEET—  
GENERAL HUNTZIGER AT RETHONDES AND ROME—  
SIGNING OF THE ARMISTICE—THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR  
LEAVES BORDEAUX

THE port where the freighter anchored for the night was at the innermost point of a bay which by twilight looked imposingly severe. There was a long, dark-green crescent of dunes such as you see in a landscape by Poussin. Those magicians, Time and Nature, had taken delight in imparting a moving dignity and simplicity to these escarpments. The companion with whom I was gazing at this array of dunes, as we leaned on the ship's rail, broke the silence to point out a little fort which, standing in advance of the port, seemed like a watchman of stone and turf.

“ That might be a bit of Vauban's work.”

“ Yes. Seventeenth century.”

That might have carried us away from the present. But it was not to be. The wireless announced that the French plenipotentiaries had arrived at Compiègne and that Hitler would receive them in the Forest of Rethondes at the same spot and in the very coach in which Erzberger was received by Marshal Foch!

You willed it, Weygand! France would drink the cup to the dregs.

Some British airmen with whom I had struck up friendly relations tortured me, without intending to, by asking me as I am condemned often to be asked:

“ How did it happen ? ”

“ And the fleet ? ” inquired a sailor. “ Are they going to hand it over to the Germans and the Italians ? ”

A gleam of hope in the darkness. The Germans have bombed Bordeaux, from which the Government are apparently going to depart for another destination. Optimists build up a whole structure of prophecies. They will move to Toulon, Perpignan, then perhaps to Africa. Dreams, nothing but dreams which would vanish in London.

Certainly M. Baudouin swore to Lord Lloyd and to Mr. Alexander on the nineteenth, as he did to Sir Ronald Campbell and to other Ambassadors, that the Government was going to set out for Perpignan, Port Vendres, and then for Africa. Lord Lloyd and Mr. Alexander cabled the news to Mr. Winston Churchill, but when they returned to London it had already ceased to be true.

The object of M. Baudouin's life was to mislead those politicians who were in favour of continued resistance. In order to avert hostile activity on their part, the Bordeaux Government increased their illusion by preparing the *Massilia* trap for them. Some, and in particular M. Mandel, fell into it. Once these men had left for Casablanca on board the *Massilia* the Marshal's Government was easier in mind. Later on, steps would be taken to make out that this departure, which had been suggested and facilitated, was an act of treason and desertion.

Besides, the Marshal, to whom it was impossible to entrust tasks of dissimulation which he would have bungled, if he did not altogether refuse them, had never ceased to remark with almost infantile vanity :

*“ I have given myself to my people and I stay with them.”*

In Mr. Winston Churchill's speech of June 25th, to which it is always appropriate to refer in order to settle the British position during this period, the Prime Minister drew attention to the journey of Lord Lloyd and Mr. Alexander to Bordeaux, and disclosed the imperative

conditions on which, on the sixteenth, he had made France's abandonment of her obligations dependent. These conditions, communicated to M. Reynaud, had been reiterated by Sir Ronald Campbell to the new Government. M. Baudouin and Admiral Darlan especially had solemnly pledged themselves to respect them. They were not respected. It is impossible to insist too much on this point if one wants to judge impartially the decision that the British Government had to take in the matter of the French fleet, and which caused the unfortunate affair at Oran :

" We reminded the new Government that the condition indispensable to their release had not been complied with, the condition being that they (the French vessels) should be sent to a British port. There was plenty of time to do it ; it would have made no difference to the negotiations, and the terms could hardly have been more severe than they were. In order to reinforce the earnestness with which we held our views, we sent the First Sea Lord and the First Lord, as well as Lord Lloyd, to establish what contacts were possible with the new Ministers.

" Everything was, of course, fusing into collapse at that time, but many solemn assurances were given that the Fleet would never be allowed to fall into German hands. It was, therefore, with grief and amazement, to quote the words of the Government's statement, which we issued on Sunday, that I read Article 8 of the armistice terms. This article, to which the French Government have subscribed, says that the French fleet, excepting that part left free for the safeguarding of French interests in the Colonial Empire, shall be collected in ports to be specified, and there demobilised and disarmed under German or Italian control.

" From this text it is clear that the French war vessels under this armistice pass into German and Italian control while fully armed. We note, of course, in the same article the solemn declaration of the German Government that they have no intention of using them for their own purpose during the war. What is the value of that ? Ask half a

dozen countries what is the value of such a solemn assurance. Furthermore, the same Article 8 of the armistice excepts from the operation of such assurances and solemn declarations those units necessary for coast surveillance and minesweeping. Under this provision it would be possible for the German Government to reserve ostensibly for coast surveillance any existing units of the French fleet.

“ Finally, the armistice can at any time be voided on any pretext of non-observance, and the terms of armistice explicitly provide for further German claims when any peace between Germany and France comes to be signed.

“ Such, in very brief epitome, are the salient points in this lamentable and also memorable episode, of which no doubt a much fuller account will be given by history.”

Mr. Winston Churchill had definitely stated to M. Reynaud: “ *Provided that the French fleet was dispatched to British ports.*”

Now the Bordeaux Government gave its pledge to Berlin to collect the French vessels in ports which were to be specified, and undertook that they should be disarmed under German and Italian control. It took the false ingenuity of sanctimonious Charles Roux to find an answer to anyone who complained of the difference. “ *But,*” he said, “ *Hitler has promised not to take possession of the ships!*”

People who plunge into infamy end by wallowing in it with delight !

Mr. Winston Churchill returned to the subject even more explicitly on July 11th, when he had to justify the action of the British fleet at Oran in dealing with a portion of the French fleet.

“ When two nations are fighting together under long and solemn alliance against the common foe, one of them may be stricken down and overwhelmed, and may be forced to ask its ally to release it from its obligations ; but the least that could be expected was that the French Government, in abandoning the conflict and leaving the whole weight to fall upon Great Britain and the British Empire, would have been careful not to inflict needless injury upon their

faithful comrade, in whose final victory the sole chance of French freedom lay, and lies.

"As the whole House will remember, we offered to give full release to the French from their Treaty obligations, although these were designed for precisely the case which arose, on one condition, namely, that the French fleet should be sailed for British harbours before the separate armistice negotiations with the enemy were complete. This was not done. On the contrary, in spite of every kind of private and personal promise and assurance given by Admiral Darlan to the First Lord and to his naval colleague the First Sea Lord of the British Admiralty, an armistice was signed which was bound to place the French fleet as effectively in the power of Germany and its Italian follower as that portion of the French fleet was placed in our power when many of them, being unable to reach African ports, came into the harbours of Portsmouth and Plymouth about ten days ago. Thus I want to place on record that what might have been a mortal injury was done to us by the Bordeaux Government with full knowledge of the consequences and of our dangers, and after rejecting all our appeals at the moment when they were abandoning the Alliance and breaking the engagements which fortified it."

On June 22nd, General Huntziger, by order of the Bordeaux Government, put the signature of France, whose representative he was, at the foot of the armistice conditions imposed by the German Government.

The armistice signed, the British Ambassador no longer had anything to do in Bordeaux. When he announced his impending departure, the Minister for Foreign Affairs pretended to be astonished. "Why is the British Ambassador going away?" he asked with that innocent choirboy air which he occasionally affects. "France and England are not at war."

"No," was the answer. "But England is at war with Germany and Italy. The greater part of France is occupied by Germany and Italy, and, in those territories which are not, she is tributary and dependent."

I imagine that Sir Ronald Campbell must have spoken far more pertinently, for he is one of those cool and deliberate people, not to be put off by facetious remarks.

The event came as no surprise to the Ambassador.

Nor did it to me. I was under no illusions about the Bordeaux Government. They had thrown themselves deliberately into the claws of a system as though into a mouse-trap. If they wanted to get out, they wouldn't be able to, *and they did not want to*. Nevertheless, as long as the armistice was not signed, the tiniest flicker of hope remained like a night-light by the bedside of a dying man; so long as a trace of breath remains, a miracle is possible. Despair does not overwhelm the survivors until the last breath has been drawn.

On June 21st Hitler had received the French delegation commissioned to hear the victor's armistice terms. The four days that had elapsed between the request of June 17th and the reception of the emissaries on the twenty-first had been spent by the master of the Reich in having the train, in which Foch, Weygand's Foch, had read the Allies' armistice terms to the German delegation on November 11th, 1918, transported to Rethondes.

At Rethondes, in the train of *Foch*! Hitler in Foch's chair!

“ Weygand! Weygand!” cries a voice with curses from the depths of the tomb.

Does Weygand ever think that, in the history manuals of future ages, it will be possible to read a terrible abridged account of this kind:

“ Rethondes. On November 11th, 1918, Foch, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Weygand, dictated at Rethondes the conditions of the armistice requested by the conquered German aggressor.”

“ On June 21st, 1940, General Weygand, successor to Foch, deputed General Huntziger to capitulate to the German aggressor, who dictated the armistice terms in the same coach that had been used in 1918.”



Hitler, like Nero, might render this testimony to himself :  
*qualis artifex !*

Thus, on June 22nd, the summer solstice, a general of Alsatian origin, whom fame had almost vowed to high destinies, the delegate of Marshal Pétain and General Weygand, certified as on a funeral register a kind of *Finis Galliae* : the surrender of Great France, the resignation of the France of Joffre, of Foch and of Clemenceau, beneath the avid and insolent gaze of Goering, Ribbentrop, Hess, Brauchitsch and Raeder.

In former times the soldier who had thought himself compelled by discipline to obey the order of his superior in similar circumstances, would afterwards have driven his sword through his body.

But traditions are abolished. Nothing of the kind was announced. On the contrary, it was announced that the general who had signed the armistice of Compiègne would continue his gruesome task the next day and in even more ignominious conditions. At Rethondes he had bent the knee to an enemy, odious but conquering ; the next day he would leave for Rome to bow the France of Marengo, Magenta, Solferino and of the Isonzo, following the rout of Caporetto, before a *carabiniere* of the twelfth hour who had not even fought.

Poor, unfortunate General Huntziger, who, two months later, would be made a War Minister—without an army. That was not the dream I had for him when on December 25th, 1939, I drank in his lively, robust talk at a house in Paris. No, loyal, delightful Henri Massis, you who were on his staff, you the friend and collaborator of Bainville, our anti-German prophet, it was not what we dreamed for him when, at seventy miles an hour, you brought me your general's comforting orders of the day and your joint congratulations on my vigorous anti-Hitler, anti-German and anti-pan-German battle !

Was it these and other thoughts which besieged my mind when, during the night of June 22nd-23rd, I read

on the Savoy Hotel tape machine the following bluntly-worded item of news: “ *General Huntziger has signed the armistice with Germany. He will arrive in Rome to-morrow by air to negotiate the armistice with Italy.* ”

I don't know now. I know that a friend had led me over to the tape machine. “ There's some news ! ”

“ Bad ? ”

“ Come and see. ”

The letters burned my eyelids as though they were written in fire. I was expecting it, I repeat. Bordeaux presaged Rethondes and Rome. But the *consummatum est* ! had not been pronounced. Now it was. The blackest day in French history was drawing to a close.

Even those who have suffered an immense grief will hardly be able to imagine what mine was like that evening.

Probably it was equal to the sum total of the affliction of June 16th-17th at Bordeaux, of the oppression of exile and of the reaction of helplessness in face of the irreparable.

If I resign myself to concealing it, it is because its truth gives a sanction to the struggle which I have assigned myself.

Then, again, it is because I am anxious to extol the incomparable delicacy of which I have been the beneficiary from friends, known and unknown, who have done their skilful utmost to make me forget the resentment which they might well feel and express towards my country.

On July 14th last Mr. Winston Churchill exclaimed “ in an inspiring broadcast ” :

“ I proclaim my faith that some of us will live to see a 14th of July when a liberated France will once again rejoice in her greatness and in her glory, and once again stand forward as the champion of the freedom and the rights of man. ”

May I contribute to that end—such is my struggle—and live long enough to see the breaking of the dawn of revenge and justice !

## Epilogue

### Judgments

THE CASE OF M. REYNAUD—OPPROBRIUM OF MME. DE PORTES AND M. BAUDOUIN—GENERAL WEYGAND—THE MYSTERY OF ADMIRAL DARLAN—M. CAMILLE CHAUTEMPS, GRAVE-DIGGER OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC—M. JEANNENEY AND M. HERRIOT DO NOT KNOW THE SECRET OF BEING HEROES—THE DISAPPEARANCE OF M. ALBERT LEBRUN—M. PIERRE LAVAL, HEIR OF THE CAPITULATION—BEFORE THE STATUE OF FOCH

HAVE I shown my way clearly enough through this intricate dovetailing of men, events and ideas for the reader to understand that after May 16th capitulation was fated to happen, that one man could prevent it, because he was the leader, and failed to do so because with an unexampled mastery of the arts of treachery a clique about him, whose evil intentions he was neither able to see nor willing to fear, urged him each day a little closer towards the abdication of his rôle?

Indeed, the case of M. Reynaud is one of the saddest in the history of mankind, one of the saddest because, at one and the same time, this man lost a personal cause that, when all is taken into account, he ought to have won, and also, which is a graver matter, the cause of France.

The opprobrium of Mme. de Portes and M. Baudouin cannot, I think, be in doubt. If the former, being powerless to add anything further to her unwholesome distinction, has disappeared as those poisonous trees vanish which have no more fruit to yield, the latter is still there, and one can safely rely on his genius leading him to equal and outdo his evil actions of the past.

Have I produced sufficient corroborative evidence to

show how, as the stream of days flowed by from May 19th to June 16th, the general, come from Syria amid clouds of incense to save the army, in less than a month climbed step by step, and then more and more quickly, *down* the ladder-rungs of a legend too lofty for his courage and his inspiration? In the night of June 16th-17th he was made a Minister and, what is more, by a ponderous stroke of irony, a War Minister of an army which he was handing over, having ceased to command it. Let it be added that he is so no longer. Lord Lloyd, who saw him for the last time on June 19th, noted that in the depressed, shrunk, haggard Weygand who appeared before him then, he failed to find the Weygand he had known.

I like to think that if Lord Lloyd had seen him on the twenty-first or twenty-second, instead of on the nineteenth, he would have found himself looking at nothing but the shadow of a shadow. Now vaguely pro-consul of French Africa, he drags his tarnished stars and perhaps his remorse from place to place. One would like to think that the shades of Turenne and of Foch, his masters, inspire in him a shudder and a desire for redemption.

Admiral of the Fleet Jean Darlan must be placed a little apart from the Generalissimo. To my knowledge he had no hand in the events prior to the night of June 16th-17th. Until then he had played his part, which was a fine one. During that night Marshal Pétain appointed him Minister of Marine. Were they afraid that he might take the fleet into British harbours? By associating him with the Government they imprisoned him. Was he aware of that? Did some instinctive feeling of jealousy work in him against the British fleet, to whose Commander he was, by force of circumstances, subordinate? Was he caught up in the net of the conspiracy? Who can say how and why he made himself a party to something which ought by rights to force despairing sighs from his lips during sleepless nights?

In his conduct there is a mystery that I cannot explain. The brutal fact remains. He gave his word as a sailor.

He swore that under no circumstances could the French fleet be used by Germany or Italy, and yet he accepted the armistice clause handing over our ships to the enemy and trusting him not to make use of them. That is a mockery, to say the least of it! Had he given one sign, the Fleet would have followed him! He failed to find glory by failing in his honour. Admiral Muselier, who at the side of General de Gaulle is the head of the Free French Navy, called it out to him in stinging terms when broadcasting on October 2nd last: "He will go down to history as the admiral who surrendered." Then, after the manner of criminals who, as if from fury against themselves, plunge into their degradation, he displayed a savage vanity in figuring at the head of the scuttlers of the ships of France. It is impossible to imagine a more lamentable end to an Admiral of the Fleet. Even the waves of the sea could not wash out this stain from his uniform.

M. Camille Chautemps' particularly baneful action is already part of history. Begun almost surreptitiously on June 12th, intensified a little on June 13th at Tours, it gained volume at Bordeaux on June 15th, and the next day gathered all the violence of unrestraint. Inspired by a dual weakness, physiological and moral, and determined by the pettiness of shortsighted political ambition, it ranks M. Camille Chautemps for ever among those chiefly responsible for the capitulation. The proof leaps vividly to the eye from the story of those last days when M. Chautemps' intervention was bound to be decisive on whichever side he brought his weight to bear. If M. Chautemps supported M. Reynaud and M. Mandel, it meant that the party in favour of continued resistance was triumphant. If M. Chautemps remained neutral it was still resistance which carried the day, and the Government would have gone to North Africa. If he made armistice the object of his campaign, he precipitated the collapse of France.

The unhappy man never thought of what the sequel to his action would be.

Did he not know, therefore, or did he not want to know that for months and, more especially, for weeks past men had been playing the card of defeat in order more surely to destroy the régime and the liberties of France? That French democracy needed to be cleansed, purged of abuses, reformed, revitalised—all that, certainly! But destroyed, no! That a man like M. Camille Chautemps, who had been one of those to profit most by it, and who owed to it his elevation to the highest offices, should himself strike its death-blow, is something that no patriotic Frenchman, whether he be a Republican, a Democrat, or a plain Liberal, can ever forgive him. Party hatred once accused him of having arranged the murder of one of the greatest swindlers of the twentieth century, the too-notorious Stavisky. To-day it is common justice which stamps him as the gravedigger of the Third Republic.

As their acts or attitudes have led them forward on to some corner of the stage, these various people, prominent defeatists, notorious or vulgar politicians, have played their several parts, great or small, in the misfortunes of my country. I can leave the reader to catalogue them for himself.

Only for two people do I wish to express regret. Strictly speaking, they deserve no direct reproach, since they were throughout defenders of unlimited resistance and of absolute fidelity to the Alliance. But by reason of their functions and by what they stood for, could not one expect something more of them? As Speakers of the two Houses of the French Parliament, M. Jeanneney and M. Herriot might, as I have said, have been heroes. I am distressed for their sake that they were not, and, for the sake of the country of all three of us, more than grieved.

There is, on the other hand, one man who must be dragged to the forefront of the stage from the obscurity of the wings where he has so obstinately concealed himself.

When you are Head of the State, when the Constitution has instituted you leader of the forces of land and sea and

guardian of treaties, you have no right to wash your hands of responsibility like Pontius Pilate.

Admittedly, it was known that during the course of his career he had distinguished himself especially by a sickly irresolution and rather by his retreats than by his exploits. A Minister more than once, he had, as it were, invariably evaporated at the precise moment when a decision had to be taken. It was possibly this complete neutralism which had earned him election as President of the Republic. If this was a desirable quality in peace-time—which, incidentally, is a matter for argument—in time of war it was, to say the least, a notable inadequacy, and in the face of events of the kind with which France found herself confronted, it was a calamity.

He will say, perhaps, "But I did not want it to happen!"

But if he did not want it, it was his right and his duty to prevent it. This man, whose personal honesty is undeniable, was guilty of the worst of dishonesties towards France. The trustee of her honour, he allowed it to be sacrificed. The traditional guardian of the Constitution, without a gesture or a word of protest he suffered it to be torn up; and suddenly, without anything at all being heard of him, he disappeared as if a trapdoor had been opened and had closed again after abruptly swallowing him up. A trapdoor, did I say? He was not subjected to even that modest degree of violence. They opened an ordinary door for him and said to him: "Be off and, above all, don't make any noise, otherwise . . ." He did not even answer. He made a sign of comprehension and slipped away like an outcast.

Has any other Head of a State performed such a vanishing trick?

Albert Lebrun! Come here, give account of your stewardship! Speak! Explain yourself! What have you done with France, with our armies, our fleet, our Alliance? What have you done with what is more precious than everything, whether for peoples or for

individuals : what have you done with the honour of France ?

Consult the martyr-list of kings who have paid with their lives for their crimes, their blunders, and, sometimes, only for their weakness . . . and judge yourself, if you dare, by comparing yourself with them !

The picturesque, disturbing and enigmatic figure of M. Pierre Laval has flitted several times through my story, manœuvring, busying himself, plotting. That he worked hard behind the scenes of the political theatre is incontestable. To what extent did his influence make itself felt in the decision of June 16th, notably by his direct or indirect intervention with Marshal Pétain ? Are we to believe the boasts ascribed to him that on June 19th and 20th he prevented the Government's departure to Perpignan ? There was never any need to restrain Pétain and Baudouin from leaving. But if he clings to this distinction, let us credit him with it, the less hesitantly since, after a short period of waiting, he became for a short period, politically speaking, the most favoured heir of the infamous crime of Bordeaux, was certainly in large measure the engineer of his own good fortune, and has subsequently been at pains to justify its frightful origin.

The capitulation in June had left the country in suspense and uncertainty over the degree of abasement to which the enemy would compel France to descend. With diabolical perseverance, M. Pierre Laval devoted himself to hastening on total sacrifice, as though he feared either that a delay might allow France to be saved, or that the caution and dedication of Marshal Pétain to his task might interfere to prevent him achieving his fell purpose to the full.

Without the Marshal he would not have dared. Covered by him, without a tremor he drove the nails into the feet and hands of his crucified country.

In the days of the Byzantine Empire, the troops in Africa, and afterwards the Senate, bestowed the imperial purple, against his will, on an aged pro-consul named



## 414      Truth on the Tragedy of France

Gordien. The Emperor Maximin, against whom this election was made, assembled his troops and said to them : "The Africans have elected an old man more fitted for the tomb than for the throne."

Marshal, you have lived too long. The tomb would have taken from you the pitiful dictatorship exercised under your ægis, but it would have spared your name the degrading renown which your visit to Hitler and your acquiescence in his law will inflict upon it in the history of France.

And you, Pierre Laval, remember what was said to you by a man who, you have admitted, has always retained his forthright speech in talking to you as to all the others : "Pierre Laval, it is the wish to be, in your turn, a Führer, a Duce, like Hitler, like Mussolini, which has brought you along the road you follow. Since you could not be dictator of a victorious country, you would be dictator of a conquered one ! Since you thought yourself more likely to be one by co-operating in the victory of the conqueror, you did not wish to leave France the chance of a British victory, you shackled her fortunes to the fortunes of the enemy. . . . You wanted to be Pierre Laval the First of a mangled France !

"However cunning you may have contrived to be in politics, you acted like a madman who has neither philosophy nor history in his head. I am going to tell you something : Tyranny may follow upon the glory of battles, or establish itself by preaching revenge, or win its place in civil war. But it has never had humiliation and shame for its mounting-post.

"If, for the misfortune of France, the men you have chosen for masters won the day, they would not recall you. If, as it is my firm hope, they are finally broken. . . . Pierre Laval ! . . . Look at yourself ! I have been told that you bear the mark of fatality ! "

I am no Public Prosecutor to call for such-and-such a sentence against this man or that and, even if I were, what is the penalty which could satisfy the most holy of vengeance ? All-pervading justice, if it does not sever

## Epilogue : Judgments

the thread of their lives, will decide how they are to cut out their miserable existences beneath the weight of punishment.

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This evening, before putting the final touch to the work, into which I have put my heart and soul, I went by myself, to bow my head and meditate before the statue of Marshal Foch in Victoria Square.

My gaze followed his, which is turned towards France. I wished that the bronze would quicken into life and cry out to hurl the insults of conscience and genius at the deserters of Bordeaux. But the bronze remained dumb, its malediction silent. On this friendly soil, which he had served as fully as his own country—as the sentence carved on the stone of its pedestal attests—could I expect more than an inconsolable melancholy from him? A victim of the mirage of my own feelings, I fancied I could see this sorrow on his face, over which the sadness of twilight cast a shadow of gloom.

While forcing myself to interrogate his countenance, I slipped away into memories of 1918, the stern memories of the Chemin des Dames and of Amiens, the triumphant memories of St. Quentin, Mont-Didier, Soissons, St. Mihiel, and November 11th. Then there came to blend with his face that of the man who, despite all differences of opinion, is bound up with him in the same glory.

Almost every day of my life in Paris I saw Clemenceau's statue in the Champs-Élysées. I paid little attention to it. But this evening, as I stood close to that of Foch, it haunted my vision, the dauntless fighter, standing upright on the stone base, his scarf flying in the wind, his features harsh and tragic. I imagined him, too merciless to himself to shed tears over the destruction of his victory, condemning the pygmies of 1940, with all the contempt of which he was so richly capable, to be tormented by the Furies in spirit and soul and even more in their blood.

He had foreseen the coming of these wretches. At the

## Truth on the Tragedy of France

close of his astonishing life the man who *waged war*, and who in *waging* it, won it, found pleasure in giving a last lesson to his only love, France: from his rock in the Vendée looking out over his ocean, he wrote a life of Demosthenes, to which he added this comment: "Demosthenes would have saved his country, if it had consented to be saved."

He predicted that our country having been saved by him would be lost. He wished that another such as he might rise in his turn to lead and save her.

Marshal Foch,  
Georges Clemenceau,  
Rise again from the dead!  
Marshal Foch, inspire a soldier,  
Georges Clemenceau, inspire a Demosthenes,  
France looks for a saviour!

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Completed  
during a night  
of Winter, 1940,  
in London,  
at 7, Park Place, St. James's Street,  
amid the thunder  
of the anti-aircraft guns.

A long, rending  
whistle  
tears the air.  
A bomb falls,  
then another.  
The walls tremble,  
tremble more  
than the men and women.

This people,  
tenacious as stone,  
this people with whose life  
my life is mingled,  
will conquer.

